COVID Stories from Our Libraries

AJL News and Reviews solicited contributions from our members on how they coped with library shutdowns due to COVID-19. Thank you to all who shared their stories.

Back in March, when my school the Hebrew Academy of Nassau County (7th-12th grades) shut their doors due to Corona, the role of the library, and my role as the librarian changed. As we were no longer in the building, where most of my role is physical, helping the students find materials, navigate computers, and deal with printing issues, I had to find a way to be available to my students. Two years ago, our library began to purchase electronic and audiobooks instead of physical materials. All of the public libraries in our region were closed through June, so these e-books became essential material. One of the things that I was able to do was to purchase more of these books that supported their academic curriculum, especially the summer reading material, which has been graciously used by the students and parents. Additionally, I have made myself available to help with any academic research that students may need, especially the databases which were provided to us graciously from the New York State Library in Albany. Hopefully this fall, I will be able to continue to provide these services to our students and someday soon welcome them back into our library.

Laura Schutzman
AJL Jewish Fiction Award Committee Chair
AJL Publications Chair
Hebrew Academy of Nassau County
Uniondale, NY

(continues on page 2)
Starting Thursday, March 12, 2020, the Library of Congress was switching over to maximum telework. That afternoon and on Friday, March 13, I created surrogates by photocopying relevant pages from books. I returned to work on Monday, March 16 and focused on photocopying. I did not have a Library issued laptop, but I figured I would work things out. On March 17, I started to work from home for the first time.

At first, cataloging was a challenge. Without having access to the Library cataloging databases or the actual books, the best I could do was create records on paper. I figured that the mental activity remained the same – I eventually found PDFs of the Subject Heading Manual and did the best I could. Additionally, I also reviewed my cataloging rules and started learning Russian.

A few weeks into the maximum telework, I received my Library issued laptop which changed my working-from-home productivity. I went into work every week for a few hours to replenish and instead of photocopies, I scanned relevant pages and created PDFs of the surrogates. This was great as the images were crystal clear. Starting in July, I have been going into the Library two days a week to work onsite.

Although the Library has been closed, we have all been working. The Library has worked hard to keep us all abreast of news and updates by having weekly “Fireside chats.” These “chats,” which air live via WebEx, allow members of the administration to discuss the latest updates and changes related to telework and the Library’s handling of the situation as well as our phased return to work onsite. Sometimes they also bring on guest speakers. During the chats, members of the Library community are able to ask questions. I personally enjoy these sessions because they help me stay connected to the Library even from afar.

Since there are staff going onsite, many are able to assist those who cannot come to the Library physically. I took on new or additional responsibilities, such as scanning relevant pages for other colleagues’ cataloging, helping with acquisitions by opening boxes and inventorying them, and learning how to stamp and strip the books. The goal is to keep production moving.

During these exceptional times, the Library has managed to transition to maximum telework and still maintain productivity. There is a sense of community through the “fireside chats,” during which staff are kept up to date with the news. As the Library phases in to onsite work, many have risen up to the challenge to work from home, be creative in their work, and maintain their reserve until life returns to normal.

Haim A. Gottschalk, Hebraica and Judaica Cataloging Librarian
Library of Congress
Washington, DC

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Ours is a small Jewish community, but we're very cohesive. Once everything shut down in mid March, our religious school director Nora Chaus set to work to get the school on Zoom and one week later we were up and running. She made sure to continue library and music in the online curriculum, which challenged me to adapt storytime for the little ones and text study for the older students. I was lucky that staff were still permitted to enter our synagogue, allowing me to access materials and keep things going. Though it was painful seeing the library lie mostly dormant, the school helped me to keep busy, and I made the final push to get the catalog online. Now we're all set up for curbside service and (so far) the library budget is intact.

Rachel Haus
Library Director
Congregation of Moses Fisher Library
Kalamazoo MI

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I work at two small synagogue libraries, one as a volunteer and the other salaried. As of March 15, both have been closed and until about two weeks ago they were inaccessible to me. In effect, I walked out and closed the door behind me with dinner still on the table, so to speak.

Story times and class visits have been a major part of my work and, in fact, took up most of my time in my paid position. I offered my services to both preschool and religious school with some suggestions. However, neither administrator was very interested even though teachers, kids, and staff praised the in-library sessions. At my volunteer library, I did a few online storytimes primarily because the families wanted storytime to continue. I have received a few emails with questions about books or for information and I've continued to write my regular columns, highlighting a lot of virtual sources instead of just books. During the last couple of weeks, I've been ordering books from home to use up budget money. At one library, budget funds have been flat for at least five years and I have no idea how next year's budget will be affected. I'd like to try some sort of limited return and borrowing service, but unfortunately, I think the reaction from the administrators will be "NO!!" The library is so low on the list of priorities that when the website was redesigned, the library was omitted.

Aileen Grossberg
North New Jersey

March began as one might expect, thoughts of Purim (and maybe even Passover) on our minds. Little did we know what the next few months might entail. In what seems like an instant with much coordination, organization and effort, the library staff at Yeshiva University swiftly and creatively found ways to provide much needed services to our students, faculty and staff.

Providing services while off-site highlighted the cooperative spirit whereby utilizing our personal collections and those of our colleagues when necessary to assist with requests. We look forward to increasing services both on and off-site and especially to a safe and healthy return to campus.

Tina Weiss
Head Librarian of Hebraica-Judaica
Mendel Gottesman Library
Yeshiva University
New York, NY

AJL Solidarity Statement of April 20, 2020

The Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) condemns the hatred, violence, and systemic racism infecting our nation that led to the horrifying death of George Floyd at the hands of police just a few days ago. As the leading authority on Judaic librarianship, we stand for learning and understanding; more importantly, we stand for justice (tzedek) and the protection of human life (pikuach nefesh). In solidarity with the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA), we pledge to engage with our friends in the Black community, to work for the repair of the world (tikkun olam).

As a number of Black Jews explain on the Jewish Telegraphic Agency website, the work of anti-racism is exhausting, and people of all races and backgrounds need to step up, speak out, and take action. The Ethics of Our Fathers (Mishna Avot 2:21) famously says, "You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it." AJL, together with everyone who craves a just world, will continue to work toward justice for all.
A Note from the Editor

What a summer it has been! If you were fortunate enough to attend AJL’s spectacular virtual Annual Conference (AJL Digital Conference 2020: Staying Connected held June 28 to July 02), you were treated to the best of the best in Jewish scholarship, librarianship, and diverse voices. Yasher koach to the conference coordinators who worked tirelessly and creatively to turn an obstacle into an opportunity. I was so happy to ‘meet’ many of you on Zoom and look forward to seeing all in person one day (#NextYearInChicago).

Putting together this issue was an embarrassment of riches, even with the challenges of Covid-19 lockdown. We are fortunate to have a "Seven Questions With..." interview with Mark Oppenheimer, Liel Liebovitz, and Stephanie Butnick, podcasters extraordinaire from Unorthodox: The Podcast. I think you will enjoy reading about their experiences with libraries and Jewish literature. If you have never heard their podcast, make haste. It’s both hilarious and thought provoking.

Another highlight of this issue is that you, our members, shared some of your experiences with Covid-19 lockdown in your library workplaces. We are living in momentous times and it is valuable to share and learn from each other now, and to preserve our experiences for later. Other contributions include a new and regular column from our esteemed president, Kathy Bloomfield, an article on University of Pennsylvania’s Katz Center’s exhibit on Jewish Lives, and a story of Jewish Geography from contributor Leah Bennett. As always, we have an excellent compilation of thoughtful and incisive reviews of Jewish literature.

Thank you to our editing team and reviewers for putting in the hard work for this issue. Speaking of our team, please join me in welcoming our newest co-editor for Children’s/YA Literature, Ellen Drucker, who will be working with current co-editor Lisa Silverman. Our longtime co-editor Chava Pinchuk is stepping down from that role to focus on other endeavors. Chava, profound thanks for your years of service!

I’m wishing you all l’shanah tovah tikateivu v’tieichateimu, a sweet and healthy new year. As always, please feel free to reach out to me with comments and suggestions at generaleditor@jewishlibraries.org

Many thanks,
Sally

From the President’s Desk

KATHLEEN BLOOMFIELD, PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH LIBRARIES

Dear Friends,

What a busy few months! Coping with a world-wide pandemic, preparing for our first digital conference, being installed as AJL’s President, meeting with our new Board and Council, and so much more. I have barely had time to think about the summer we are not really having.

Accolades are still pouring in about AJL’s Digital Conference 2020: Staying Connected. The experience of creating our first ever digital conference reinforces my belief in the power of the volunteer! An extraordinary group of people put that amazing online conference together in just ten weeks. Once again, I want to thank Lenore Bell, Jackie Ben-Efraim, Emily Bergman, Michelle Chesner, Marcie Eskin, Elana Gensler, Dina Herbert, Rachel Kamin, Rebecca Levitan, Heidi Rabinowitz, and Lisa Silverman for all their hard work. A special thank you to our Development Associate, Jerry Krautman, for being ever present in the background making sure rooms were open, music was played, and technical details were in order. If you were unable to attend, you still have a second chance to view all of the sessions by visiting our website and registering here.

Our 2020 Membership Campaign: Strengthening Our Connection is in full swing. Have you seen our Membership Campaign video? Have you renewed your membership and received your 2020-21 collectible pin? Are you looking forward to our Members’ Only Gala on October 18, 2020 with special guests...
soon to be named? Sharon Benamou, VP Membership, and the Membership Committee, consisting of Heidi Rabinowitz, Michelle Chesner, Jerry Krautman, and myself, are working hard to provide monthly MEMBERS-ONLY programs throughout the next year. Virtual Round Tables, Educational Programs and so much more will enable us all to continue Strengthening Our Connection to one another throughout this tumultuous year.

I invite you to renew your membership in AJL today. Continue to be part of the Leading Authority for Judaic Librarianship. Meet, work, and learn with a remarkable group of dedicated individuals who will enrich your life, just as you will enrich theirs.

Along with our Membership Campaign video, you will have seen several emails from AJL members outlining the many reasons why AJL is important to them. I want to invite you to tell your story. AJL has created a Community on the StoryCorps Archive website and we want to hear YOUR stories about AJL! To participate, visit StoryCorps Connect to create a free account and record a remote interview with any AJL friend using our list of AJL Interview Questions. Make sure to save your recording to the Association of Jewish Libraries Community when you're done. FYI, the time limit for recording is 40 minutes. There's a helpful video and detailed instructions on the StoryCorps Support page. If you still have questions after checking that out, email AJL Member Relations Chair Heidi Rabinowitz at bookoflifepodcast@gmail.com. We can't wait to hear your stories about being a part of AJL!

One of the many items on my list of “things to accomplish” while serving as AJL President is making sure that AJL has a voice within the American Library Association (ALA). AJL is an ALA affiliate, and thanks to the efforts of Susan Kusel, we have been fortunate to have our Sydney Taylor Award winners recognized at the ALA-Youth Media Awards announcement session for the past two years. We are also honored that Emily Bergman is currently serving as the Chair of the Jewish Information Committee which is part of the Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table (EMIERT). Emily and Susan are our new ALA Liaisons. We are very grateful to Elliot H. Gertel, our previous liaison, who provided the foundation on which we have been able to accomplish so much within ALA. If you are an ALA member, please contact Emily (emilyannebergman@gmail.com) and/or Susan (susankusel@yahoo.com) and let them know. As we plan programs for our AJL-ALA Cohort during ALA conferences, we want to reach out to you. If you would like to become an ALA member and strengthen our voice within that organization, you can do that here, or contact Emily or Susan. They are happy to provide you with any information you might need.

As librarians, we have an important role in making sure the 2020 Census count is complete and accurate. There is information about how members in the United States can help on the ALA website.

I want to encourage all AJL members in the United States to participate in National Voter Registration Day on Tuesday, September 22, 2020. This nonpartisan event is designed to encourage all eligible voters to be registered in time for the General Election in November.

AJL is always looking for volunteers to serve on our many committees. If you are interested, please see our Help Wanted section in this newsletter.

Rosh Hashanah begins on Friday, September 18, 2020. I want to wish you all a Sweet and, most importantly, Healthy New Year of 5781. May we all be strengthened by this past year’s experiences and look toward a brighter tomorrow with friends and family.

Stay Well,
Kathy B.
Seven Questions with Unorthodox: Podcasters Mark Oppenheimer, Stephanie Butnick, and Liel Leibovitz

AJL News and Reviews spoke with Mark Oppenheimer, Stephanie Butnick, and Liel Leibovitz, the irreverent hosts of the number one Jewish podcast in the world, Unorthodox. The podcast is a production of Tablet Magazine where Butnick is Deputy Editor, Leibovitz is Editor at Large, and Oppenheimer is Senior Editor. All three are co-authors of The Newish Jewish Encyclopedia: From Abraham to Zabars and Everything In Between (Artisan, 2019), a contemporary treasury of Jewish history and culture

AJL: Thank you all for taking the time to speak with AJL News and Reviews! As podcasters at Unorthodox, “the world’s leading Jewish podcast™,” you have your (collective) finger on the pulse of Jewish popular culture. Are Jews still “People of the Book,” in the broadest sense of being a culture of readers? And not unrelated, what are you reading?

MO: Definitely Jews still buy books, and we suspect they read them, too. We often come together around books or book festivals, which is inspiring. As for me, I have been reading a lot of the fiction of Richard Russo, and I have just started a biography of the English typeface designer and sculptor Eric Gill (famous for his Gill Sans font).

AJL: What do you recall as your early experiences with libraries? Liel, we know you did not grow up in the US, what are your different experiences with libraries in the US and in Israel?

SB: I fondly remember the Great Neck Library on Long Island, where I grew up. I remember getting my first library card and feeling very grown up. That library card helped me grow up, and sparked my love of reading.

LL: The library in Herzliya, where I grew up, was my second home. I would visit it every afternoon, taking advantage of their very generous policies and checking out a big pile of books each time. Then, I...
would walk home slowly, shuffling the books and putting them in the order I was going to read them. It was sheer bliss, and I can’t imagine my childhood without it.

AJL: The All of Kind Family novels by Sydney Taylor are a landmark series in Jewish children’s literature with substantial staying power for books that began publication in the 1950s and take place in the early 20th century. Are you familiar with the books, either from your own childhood reading or as parents of readers of the series? If so, why do you think these books still resonate deeply with young Jewish readers?

MO: I confess I have never read them, but my wife—who grew up on the Lower East Side, so kind of lived those books—has read them aloud to our daughters, who practically have them memorized.

SB: I first encountered Sydney Taylor’s beloved book series when I started working at Tablet, and I quickly realized why they were such classics. They transport you to the tenements of the Lower East Side at the turn of the century and offer a clever, candid look at the life of the Jewish immigrants who lived there.

AJL: What kind of books do you wish were being written about Jewish life that aren’t being written yet? For example, would you like to see a book called If You Give a Mouse a Hamantaschen, or its companion read, If You Give a Mouse a Top Sheet?

SB: I would love to know where mice stand on our perennial podcast debate over the utility of top sheets, as well as whether they prefer Saran Wrap or tin foil. I think something great is the number of books that now show the diversity of the Jewish experience, all over America and throughout the world. Jewish communities exist far beyond the Lower East Side, and that’s something we should celebrate and spotlight.

AJL: As book authors and as writers/editors at Tablet Magazine, what is your experience, if any, of libraries and librarians as partners in the research process, such as through access to digital collections, librarian guidance on the finding materials/sources, or otherwise?

LL: Having written several non-fiction books that required hundreds of hours of research in libraries on three continents, I’ve had the opportunity and the privilege to learn first-hand the magic acts performed daily by librarians. It’s easy to imagine that all you need is access to books or files, and that you can just conduct your research by yourself, like you’d do on Google. But once you jump into a project, and are fortunate enough to have a library Jedi guide you, you realize what a tremendous amount of erudition and empathy goes into a librarian’s job. My books are, without a doubt, all much better for having librarians help me find the right sources, ask the right questions, and uncover the right things.

AJL: In children’s librarianship and publishing, there has been a significant movement towards building collections with diverse books to serve as “mirrors and windows” to young readers. However, Jewish content or representation is often overlooked, not considered diverse. Many Jewish librarians and authors are trying to change that perception. What role do you think Jewish life, in all its own diversity, should play in multicultural representation in children’s literature?

MO: It’s critical. One problem is that the publishing industry is filled with secular and nonobservant Jews who are not particularly interested in Jewish ritual or culture in their own lives; they are rightly enthralled with the richness of other minority traditions, but hesitant to look at the richness in their own. And because we are seen—in many ways wrongly—as “white” people, it’s supposed we have “enough” children’s books of our own, which is not true.

AJL: Thank you Mark, Stephanie, and Liel for sharing your time with us! Our last question: You are all co-authors of the Newish Jewish Encyclopedia (Artisan, 2019). Was it hard to keep it to one volume? And was there any inspiration from the very popular The Jewish Catalog series from the 1970s? Were you even aware of that book series since you would have been quite young when it came out?

SB: We took deep inspiration from The Jewish Catalog, and felt that enough had changed in Jewish life since the 70s that we could humbly step in and offer our own encyclopedic window into Jews and Judaism. It was quite a challenge keeping it to one volume, and believe me, we hear from readers about things we forgot to include. We love that; this book is meant as an invitation to a million fun and engaging conversations about Judaism, and we may just have to do another volume!
New Virtual Exhibit on “The Jewish Home”

ARTHUR KIRON, PH.D.
SCHOTTENSTEIN-JESSELSON CURATOR OF JUDAICA COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA LIBRARIES

Fellows at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, in partnership with the Penn Libraries, recently launched their 2019-20 fellowship year web exhibition entitled The Jewish Home: Dwelling on the Domestic, the Familial, and the Lived-In. This exhibition highlights examples of the formative and intimate contexts of Jewish homes, houses and households, drawing from texts in the Penn Libraries’ collections and from around the world.

The contributors interpret Jewish domestic culture, architecture, clothing, landscape, and material evidence through the lenses of archaeological, anthropological, historical, legal, literary, and visual research. Among the topics discussed are Jewish domestic labor, home and homeland, the cosmopolitan home, ghettoized homes, traumatized homes, refugee homes, Soviet shtetl homes, symbolic homes, embodied homes, health and hygiene, affordable housing, as well as homelessness within the framework of broad social and political contexts. Also treated are Jewish costume and clothing, Jewish domestic customs, including lighting Sabbath candles and inscribing marriage contracts, and the homes and hands through which Jewish books have passed.

The time periods covered in the exhibit span the ancient Near Eastern archeological sites of home, the ancient rabbinic home as a worksite, Fatimid Egyptian Jewish home interiors, early modern Jewish households of masters and enslaved people, modern representations of Jewish notions of home and office in the visual arts, and studies that approach the home as part of the built environment and design of local neighborhoods.

The Exhibition can be viewed on the University of Pennsylvania Library website.

A Funny Thing Happened to Me After the AJL-NYMA Meeting

LEAH SCHECHTER BENNETT
LIBRARIAN, YESHIVA OF FLATBUSH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, BROOKLYN, NY

It was a cool, damp evening in December at the New York Public Library. I had attended a fruitful conference of librarians from the AJL-NYMA (Association of Jewish Libraries – New York Metropolitan Area) chapter, combined with a tour of the massive and magnificent Beaux Arts building. The hour was late and the library would be closing soon. The weather looked ominous — was a storm brewing? But one of my goals — indeed, one of the reasons I was so keen to come to the New York Public Library in Midtown Manhattan — was to view the much-acclaimed exhibit on J. D. Salinger, the brilliant but reclusive author of one of the greatest works of the twentieth century, The Catcher in the Rye. In addition to his manuscripts, letters, and photographs, the exhibit featured never-before-seen papers and artifacts, including his typewriter, pens, and pipe holder, a bowl he made at camp when he was a boy, and his revolving nightstand, stacked with books untouched since his death in 2010. My nightstand, like those of many bibliophiles, is also a tower of tomes that I intend to read . . . someday. Salinger’s heirs gathered these items together so the public could better understand this inscrutable man, who for years hid away in small-town New Hampshire, never granting interviews.
However, the New York Public Library and the Salinger estate stipulated that cameras and cell phones would be prohibited in the exhibit space after photos of the display items turned up on the internet. Salinger’s son, Matt, felt that his father would not have approved. In addition, electronic devices would also destroy the intimate, communion-like experience that the viewers should have with his personal items. His son was a stalwart protector of his legacy. But the visiting public was not wholly pleased. Some visitors balked. They did not want to part with their precious devices at the checkpoint outside the exhibit, yet most did. All of this added to the buzz surrounding the exhibition, which could be seen in the glowing reviews, as well as feature articles about the Salinger Trust and the restrictions imposed upon the sometimes noncompliant visitors. I was intrigued and wanted to see it all for myself.

So I dutifully checked my coat, backpack, and phone at “Checkpoint Charlie” and waited in line to enter the inner sanctum. As it was getting late, I made a conscious decision—don’t read every epistle, caption, or scrap of paper, as I am wont to do! My strategy: photos, tchotchkes, nightstand, and their captions—yes. The shorter letters, articles, and manuscripts—yes. The longer, more voluminous items—sadly, no. As I perused the letters and photos in each vitrine, I learned much more about Salinger. For instance, he was a World War II veteran who was present at many major battles, such as the Battle of the Bulge, and at D-Day, as well as the liberation of a subcamp of Dachau. All of this had a profound effect upon him. He was hospitalized for post-traumatic stress and said that he never got over the smell of burning flesh in his nostrils. The man who created the brooding, hypersensitive Holden Caulfield, the protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye*, could not help but be tortured by his wartime experiences.

I moved with dispatch and determination from vitrine to vitrine. Though exhausted from the long day, I pushed on—who knows when I would return? This was so very interesting. Then my eyes fell upon an aged, sepia-colored newspaper clipping:

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To the Editor:

I am distressed by an invitation I have received from the United States Holocaust Memorial Council to attend a “tribute to liberators and rescuers of victims of the Holocaust” at Arlington National Cemetery on April 21. It is as inappropriate as would be an invitation from an American Indian group to attend a tribute to Custer’s last stand. Let me explain:

The Holocaust Memorial Council is supposed to preserve for future understanding and use the memory of the horror of the Holocaust. The core of any true and usable American understanding is that our Government’s role was regrettably ignoble. That is only too well documented by such historians as Leonard Dinnerstein, Walter Laqueur, and David Wyman. It is a sad record of rejection of Hitler’s victims, which contributed to their being collected for slaughter and, at best, indifference to their fate after they were penned in ghettos and death camps.

It is true that American forces liberated Europe, deliberately, doggedly, and at great human cost. It is not true, in any honestly meaningful sense, that we liberated the Holocaust victims. Rather, as German forces retreated on both fronts, American and Soviet troops came upon the death camps, unintentionally, unhurriedly, and unexpectedly.

The proposed tribute to that unplanned meeting of troops and the remnants of the previously ignored is a distortion of the historical record. The purpose of the Holocaust Memorial Council to perpetuate the truth for use in the future (or the present in Bosnia?) is subverted by that distortion.

REGINE WINDER BARSHAK
Co-chairman, Brookline Holocaust Witness Project
Brookline, Mass., April 4, 1993
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I read the name again: Regine Barshak. Wha—? I gasped. Oh, my word—I know this woman! When I was a librarian at the Brookline Public Library in the 1990s, she would come in regularly to check out books on the Holocaust. Early on, we struck up a conversation and soon became good friends. Her mission
was to uncover the truth of how the Allies failed to save the Jews when they had multiple opportunities to do so. She went to Washington, D.C., frequently to research the FDR Archives and gather documents to educate others about the action—or, rather, inaction—of the world as the European Jews were being systematically slaughtered. She herself was a child in the Drancy internment camp, outside Paris, and her family was killed by the Nazis. Why was her letter to the *New York Times* here—in the Salinger exhibit? This letter was neatly cut from the newspaper and attached to a larger sheet of paper, with marginalia on the right-hand side. The handwritten lines, in black ink, were thick and slanted. They appeared to be in all capitals because of the uniformity of size, but on closer examination, they were in the appropriate case. On an electronic device, it might look like yelling, but it wasn’t—technically. It was a strong, bold hand: “True! No ‘liberating’ was done. None. Governments, ‘statesmen,’ nations, citizens, the world over, just looked the other way or themselves felt endangered.”

Wow! I assume that Regine never knew that a world-famous author who influenced so many with his writings was himself so moved by her letter that he cut it out, added annotations, and saved it in his files. Or did she know? I doubted it. I wanted to shout—I KNOW THIS WOMAN!—but I didn’t dare make a scene. Everyone was quietly viewing the items with a reverence that bordered on awe.

After I retrieved my coat, backpack, and phone, I exited the building, my head whirling. Is my dear friend Regine still alive? I regretted that I had lost contact with her when I left the Boston area for New York City in 2002. I reminisced about the spirited and intense conversations that we had in the library and would often continue over a meal in a local Brookline restaurant. One day, she gave me a large, heavy, expansive file folder of papers. “You are interested in my research, so please take these to read. They are copies of documents and articles . . . ,” she said. I took them. Heavy in weight, heavy in content. I will read them soon, I thought. And the days turned into years. Once I was tempted to throw the file folder away. There is so little space in most Brooklyn apartments and I was determined to be ruthless about streamlining. I wondered if I would ever find the time to go through all these documents. But my packrat husband, who saves every scrap of paper, insisted that I keep it. I stashed it away in the basement, where it sat between Pesach boxes for almost two decades.

The next day, I googled her name and, thanks to the internet, found a video of her, in less time than it took to write this sentence, in a film entitled *Soul Witness*. I clicked on it, and there was Regine, the kind and impassioned older woman that I remembered, telling us not to forget in her thick French accent. I contacted the producer of that film, R. Harvey Bravman, who wrote back immediately, telling me to call him. I was very excited. *Was she still alive?!* I had an uneasy feeling, though, that she had passed. In our conversations, I remember that she talked about her grown children, two daughters and a son. Do they know that her letter is showcased in one of the most important and popular exhibits in New York City? I must contact them and tell them that. Otherwise, would they ever know?

Harvey told me that Regine had indeed passed away years ago, but he would contact her children and they would get back to me, which they did. No, they did not know about their mother writing to Salinger. I clarified — no, she didn’t write to him, but, in a sense, he wrote to her! Her letter to the editor stirred him so deeply that he preserved it and added his own commentary. Like Holden Caulfield, Salinger couldn’t abide “phonies” and liars. Regine and Salinger were kindred spirits — twin truth-seekers. Her children were gobsmacked. Her daughter Danielle told me that her mother was a prodigious letter writer, and her letters to the editor were published widely. But nothing like this. They made plans to drive in from Massachusetts as soon as they could to see their mother’s letter in the exhibit, and afterward we would meet for lunch. And I would hand over the precious folder of documents, which they knew nothing about!

Then, lo and behold, another email from R. Harvey Bravman arrived in my inbox. A filmmaker was making a documentary about letters to the *New York Times* editors and he would like to interview us for the film! *Huh?* I felt that I was the linchpin in connecting the Barshak children to the filmmaker with the purpose of keeping Regine’s legacy, and that of all survivors, alive. If I hadn’t called Harvey to find Regine, he would not have connected this filmmaker to me. How serendipitous that everything at that moment revolved
around letters to the *New York Times*. But this delusion was dashed when I wrote the filmmaker. He was a research fellow at the New York Public Library who happened to be making a film about the impact of the *New York Times* letters to the editor on people’s lives. He was also a Salinger fan and had discovered Regine’s letter in the vitrine, just as I did. He was so thrilled with this find that he wanted to use it as a focal point in his film. Like me, he contacted Harvey, a few days after I did. And he sought to interview Regine’s children for the film. So I wasn’t the linchpin after all, and no movie career for me, but I’m delighted that I contacted Regine’s children—Rachelle, Danielle, and Joel—and that we would soon meet.

Two nights before our scheduled lunch in the city, I knew I must read the contents of the folder before I gave it to them, and I’m so glad that I did. Danielle did say that her mother was a prodigious letter writer. Indeed, there were several letters to the editor, from the *New York Times* and the *Boston Globe* to smaller, local Jewish newspapers. She saved her drafts. I found a few personal notes to me. One directed me to notice how the editors had “slashed” her original letters, thereby watering them down. There were several fascinating articles about the inability of the U.S. government and the Vatican to rescue the Jews, about Nazis who escaped to live out their lives in South America and the U.S. via the “ratlines” set up by the Vatican, and about how survivors were faring some twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years after the end of the war. Most striking was that just like Salinger, Regine would cut out articles and tape them to paper, adding commentary! For instance, on an article with the headline “Some Survivors Still Suffering,” she wrote, “Not ‘some’—all [double-underlined] of them. Unless they have amnesia.” Alongside another headline, “Many US Jews Trying to Forget—and They Can’t,” she wrote, “It is memory that makes us human.” J. D. Salinger and Regine Barshak were indeed kindred spirits.

I was unable to secure a copy of the original clipping in the vitrine with J. D. Salinger’s annotations, though not for want of trying. His legacy is vigorously safeguarded. I would like to give grateful acknowledgment to Amanda Seigel, librarian in the Dorot Jewish Division, New York Public Library, for her immense contribution in putting together the AJL-NYMA conference and for securing a copy of Regine Barshak’s original letter for me. She’s a librarian extraordinaire.

**AJL Members Support National Library of Israel**

**Jacqueline Benefraim, AJL Vice President for Development, Special Collections Librarian at American Jewish University**

On August 6, 2020, Fanny Goldstein Award winner Elliot H. Gertel shared on HaSafran that the National Library of Israel would be furloughing 300 of its employees because of government cuts and a decline in donations. AJL Member Yoel Finkel, who is the curator of the National Library of Israel's Chaim and Chana Salomon Judaica Collection, assured us that this was only a temporary closure.

Arthur Kiron, the Schottenstein-Jesselson Curator of Judaica Collections at University of Pennsylvania, then posted a call for donations on HaSafran. I, like many other AJL members, promptly responded by donating on the link Arthur provided. It was only the cost of a tank of gas for the car I barely drive now.

Two days after I made the donation, I received a personalized thank you note from Adina Kanefield, the Acting Executive Director for NLI, USA. She asked me how I knew about the furlough and the need for donations. When I replied that I had heard about the dilemma on the Association of Jewish Libraries’ listserv, HaSafran, she replied with “This is inspiring and humbling to see a community of professionals rally together.”

The outpouring of care for NLI and its employees demonstrates that AJL’s mission statement, “The Association of Jewish Libraries is an international professional organization that fosters access to information and research in all forms of media relating to all things Jewish. The Association promotes Jewish literacy and scholarship and provides a community for peer support and professional development,” is carried out even during times of adversity.
Learning and Spreading Knowledge…

ELLEN SHARE, JEWISH EDUCATOR, RETIRED LIBRARIAN, & FORMER BOARD MEMBER, POTOMAC, MD

I recently gave a presentation at the Summer of NewCAJE Conference entitled, Picture Books and Jewish Identity. NewCAJE is an organization for Jewish educators in all capacities. The conference had been scheduled for about a week in Towson, Maryland, but because of the pandemic, it was moved to virtual and delayed for a month. I had previously given a similar presentation on significant Jewish children’s authors at the AJL Conference in Boston, two years ago. Their Love of Children had reviewed the similarities and differences in the life and work of four Jewish children picture book authors: Ezra Jack Keats, Maurice Sendak, and H.A. and Margret Rey. I was glad for the opportunity to again showcase Jewish children’s authors as making a major contribution to children’s literature. Art Spiegelman wrote, “it has been said that the picture book industry is a byproduct of European immigration to the United States, and that the explosion of the picture book industry worldwide is the result of a fertile Jewish entrepreneurship.” I also introduced the AJL website and pointed out the databases of children’s bibliographies, values, and Sydney Taylor Book Award Winners and Notable Books.

I also introduced the “whole book approach” to reading, which I had learned about at the AJL conference in Boston. Megan Dowd Lambert had spoken at a session and had introduced her book, Reading Picture Books with Children: How to Shake Up Storytime and Get Kids Talking about What They See (Charlesbridge 2015). She had presented her ideas on bringing awareness to the physical components (title page, layout of pages, typography, etc.) of the book along with the story. This approach works particularly well in virtual learning because it involves open-ended questions and becomes interactive.

I was grateful to be able to attend our outstanding AJL’s Digital Conference 2020: Staying Connected this year. I learned from Joni Sussman, publisher with Kar-Ben, in Listening & Learning about Diversity in Jewish Literature for Children & Teens, that Lerner Books has given free access to Kar-Ben eBooks until mid-September. This enabled the attendees at my session at NewCAJE to read books online.

I am grateful to AJL for providing me with opportunities to learn and share as a Judaica librarian. I hope that our members commit to attending yearly conferences which will contribute beyond measure to their professional development.

AJL Conference Recap! Jewish Fiction Award Committee Presented “Fresh Lit: Recent and Forthcoming Adult Jewish Fiction”

LAURA SCHUTZMAN, AJL JEWISH FICTION AWARD COMMITTEE CHAIR, AJL PUBLICATIONS CHAIR, HEBREW ACADEMY OF NASSAU COUNTY UNIONDALE, NY

On June 30th, the Jewish Fiction Award Committee presented “Fresh Lit: Recent and Forthcoming Adult Jewish Fiction” during the annual AJL Conference, virtual for the first time due to Covid. The session began with Rosalind Reisner, outgoing committee chair, interviewing 2020 Award Winner Goldie Goldblum on her book, On Division, about the Chasidic community of Brooklyn. Participants were able to ask questions before the session as well as during the webinar. Roz then interviewed 2020 honor winner Julie Orringer, author of The Flight Portfolio a book about Varian Fry, an American diplomat who helped rescue Jews in France during World War II.

The next part of the program was the committee members sharing their recommendations. Committee members Rosalind Reisner, Merrily Hart, Rachel Kamin, Laura Schutzman, and Sheryl Stahl presented the titles that Jewish librarians should know about in a variety of subjects, from historical and contemporary fiction to split-screen (multiple time frames) books and genre fiction.

Following the conference, the Jewish Fiction Award Committee said goodbye to members Rosalind Reisner, and Merrily Hart and welcomed Paula Breger and Beth Dwoskin. The 2021 committee, now chaired by Laura Schutzman, is already hard at work during this unprecedented time in acquiring material for the upcoming award that will be announced in January 2021. We look forward to seeing you all in real life (hopefully!) next June.
Heidi Rabinowitz Presents at ALA Virtual Event
EMILY BERGMAN, TEMPLE SINAI OF GLENDALE FREEDMAN LIBRARY, GLENDALE, CA; SSCPL VICE PRESIDENT

The American Library Association (ALA) 2020 Annual Conference, like all other conferences this year, went virtual. AJL member, Heidi Rabinowitz, was on the panel for the Ethnic Materials Information Exchange Round Table (EMIERT) Chair’s Program, Promoting Multicultural Library Services in Virtual Spaces.

Several programs created by AJL members were submitted to the ALA Program Committee, but none were accepted. I got myself appointed to the EMIERT Program Committee, hoping I could get a program of interest to AJL members as the EMIERT Chair’s program; however, the program was already in the works, so I just helped with other committee tasks. I am the current Chair of the EMIERT Jewish Information Committee. At the ALA Midwinter meeting, I worked with the EMIERT ALA staff liaison to schedule a panel we had proposed as an ALA program on Combating Antisemitism and Islamophobia with Multicultural Children’s Literature to be held Sunday, hoping AJL members would come early and attend the session. When the physical ALA Annual conference went virtual, that session was cut. I was told the virtual event was shorter than the physical conference would have been, and there was no room in the schedule for it. EMIERT wants to make this panel a webinar. I contacted both panel speakers, and they were more enthusiastic about the webinar than an ALA session. The webinar would bring more viewers, with the expectation that the ALA virtual event registrations would be low. The plans for the webinar are still in the works.

When I first asked to be on the Program Committee, I was told the committee was full and didn’t need any more members. I asked to be on the committee for just one year, because I wanted to try to get a joint ALA AJL program, because both conferences would be in Chicago, and the request was approved. I didn’t think I would be able to put my plan in place, because the committee only plans the Chair’s Program, which was already basically set. My insistence on being made a member of the Program Committee paid off. The original Chair’s Program would not work in a virtual conference, so on short notice the committee had to create a new program, and the new topic, Promoting Multicultural Library Services in Virtual Spaces, was approved to be the topic. The committee Chair, Andrea Jamison, had one speaker but needed another one. Heidi Rabinowitz had spoken at one of the SSCPL spring roundtable sessions about how to access picture books online to use when remotely reading to children, so I suggested Heidi as the other panel member. Heidi was hesitant at first, but she joined our EMIERT Program Committee meeting and, after hearing more about the program, she agreed to join the panel.

The Chair’s Program structure is to provide the speakers with questions to which they can prepare answers. Heidi was well-prepared with useful information and slides to share about Jewish children’s books, including AJL resources. The conference sessions were pre-recorded with in-time Q&A. In the end, the Q&A technology didn’t work at the last minute, but the comments in the chat were helpful and included kudos for Heidi’s presentation.

This is a good start to bring programming of interest to Jewish libraries, librarians, and collections back to ALA. We look forward to Heidi’s webinar and hope more AJL librarians will provide ALA programming.

Latest news from Judaica Librarianship
RACHEL LEKET-MOR, EDITOR, JUDAICA LIBRARIANSHIP

Volume 21 of Judaica Librarianship, the peer-reviewed journal of AJL, was published early July after a hiatus during which the publishing platform was switched and back issues content migrated. The new and completely open access issue is available to all in accordance with AJL’s mission to promote Jewish literacy and scholarship.
The SSCPL division is represented in this volume in two research articles related to the Sydney Taylor Book Award and in the book lists curated for AJL’s Love your Neighbor project to combat Anti-Semitism, republished with an added essay by Heidi Rabinowitz and Kathleen Bloomfield. Research articles that pertain to archival collections represent the RAS division. Two columns on research literature and digital humanities keep JL’s readers current with ongoing trends in our field. The issue also pays tribute to two colleagues our community recently lost, Leah Adler and June Cummins z”l.

Three articles focus on Sephardi Jews in this issue: Victor Perera’s papers at the University of Michigan Library are explored in Gabriel Mordoch’s article about this renaissance man of Sephardic/Latin-American descent (the issue cover art is taken from Perera’s magazine); Max Daniel describes the journey of the Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel community archive from its home at a Los Angeles temple to UCLA; and Melanie Hubbard (Loyola Marymount University) lists in her article Sephardim as part of the refugee Jewish community of Shanghai during World War II, captured in Werner von Boltenstern’s camera. On the other hand, none of the 102 books awarded the Sydney Taylor Book Award in its 52 years (1968–2020) feature Sephardi Jews, as the content analysis study of this corpus found among other things (Rachel Leket-Mor and Fred Isaac). Volume 21 of Judaica Librarianship is available at https://ajlpublishing.org/.

Get Involved with AJL...Volunteers Needed!

As an AJL member you can get involved in any of the many committees currently supporting the work of AJL. From book awards to conference planning, there is something for everyone.

We currently have several opportunities for member involvement:

- **Conference Volunteers:** Volunteer to be a part of our 2021 Annual Conference. Contact Lisa Silverman at lisa.silverman2021@outlook.com

- **Are you a member of ALA?** If so, please join The Ethnic & Multicultural Information Exchange Roundtable’s Jewish Information Committee (EMIERT-JIC). Contact Emily Bergman at emilyannebergman@gmail.com

- **The RAS Division’s Reference/Bibliography Award Committee is looking for a new member.** Contact Anna Levia at amlevia@stanford.edu

- **AJL’s Virtual Roundtable Series always needs moderators to manage the conversation and Zoom cohosts to manage technical issues.** Contact Heidi Rabinowitz at bookoflifepodcast@gmail.com

- **Love books?** Have expertise in Jewish literature or writings? Why not join the News and Reviews team of reviewers? You can review just one book or several, as you like. Not only a good deed, but a professional writing credit for your resume! For details on participating contact the following editing teams:
  - Adult Reviews: Daniel Scheide dascheide@gmail.com, Rebecca Jefferson rjefferson@ufl.edu
  - Childrens/YA Reviews: Lisa Silverman lisa.silverman2021@outlook.com, Ellen Drucker edrucker@cshlibrary.org

- **AJL News and Reviews is looking for a new layout and copy editor.** This position works with the Editor-and Chief and other News and Reviews staff to produce the digital newsletter. Layout is currently accomplished in Adobe InDesign. Access and experience with InDesign or an equivalent program is needed. Contact Sally Stieglitz sstieglitz@lilrc.org.

Do you have a special skill or talent that might benefit AJL? Contact Heidi Rabinowitz, Member Relations Chair at BookofLifePodcast@gmail.com. She will find a committee that will put your skills to good use.
Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Committee  
Aileen Grossman, Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Chair

The Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Committee will be accepting manuscripts through September 30. Specific requirements for submissions are on the Awards page of the AJL website. AJL members are encouraged to pass this information along to anyone they know who might be interested in entering the competition.

The Committee welcomed two new members to the committee. Rebecca Fox is a librarian at the Boston Public Library and reviewer for The Hornbook; Heather Matthews, a former middle school teacher, is a PhD student at the University of Tennessee, concentrating in literary studies for young readers. These new members will bring a nice mix of academic and practical work with children’s literature.

2020 Conference Minutes

AJL General Meeting  
June 29, 2020  
Via Zoom

Called to order at 2:03 EDT

Dina thanked our sponsors, our national chair, Lisa Silverman, and local conference chairs, Marcie Eskin and Rachel Kamin.

Michael moved to approve minutes from the General Meeting held June 18, 2019 in Woodland Hills, CA. Etta seconded to approve the minutes. Minutes approved.

Approval of minutes from the 2019 General Membership Meeting. The minutes were accepted.

RAS President Michelle Chesner summarized the discussion in the RAS meeting. Thanked cataloging committee, Heidi Lerner is stepping down, Neil Frau-Cortes will become chair. Rachaeli said Judaica Librarianship is coming and it’s completely open access. Discussed lessons learned from COVID and how everyone is working together. Created ad hoc committee for a resolution like the Latin American and Middle Eastern Book Associations wrote on the necessity of physical books for foreign languages. Discussed needs of RAS members. Thanked Amalia Levi and awards committee for their work. Giving Robert Singerman lifetime achievement award Arthur Kiron made the intro. Group watched a recording of Robert accepting. Neil discussed putting Judaica libraries on the map.

SSCPL President Emily Bergman summarized the discussion in the SSCPL meeting. Five libraries received accreditations. Most of the meeting discussed future topics and another lively discussion on what SSCPL members want.

Rebecca Levitan gave the Sydney Taylor Body of Work award to Leslea Newman, who then gave an acceptance speech.

AJL President Dina Herbert summarized the Board & Council meetings. Jerry Krautman gave a report on his past 10 months of work. The Board approved the 2020-21 budget. We have a balance of $307,000 which is a little less than last year. We have a $60k deficit, but for several years we’ve run at a deficit. We are working on eliminating that deficit. Sharon Benamou reported that we have 438 members. We are working on more membership benefits. We will be holding more virtual round tables as we did in the spring. The Board discussed and made the big decision of raising our dues. While raising dues seems to be bad timing due to the pandemic, the reality is we are paying for 2020 items using 2021 dollars. Small increases in dues are necessary over the next 4 years. Retired and unemployed membership rates will stay low. A new category of “Friend” was created to include clergy, authors, faculty, etc. to encourage new and diverse membership. We understand times are challenging, please feel free to reach out to Kathy Bloomfield or Holly Zimmerman if you can’t afford this increase. In addition, we formed a quick list committee to put out bibliographies. Dina thanked everyone for this highlight of her professional career. Then
turned the meeting over to Elliot Gertel to introduce this year’s Fanny Goldstein Merit Award winner, Zachary M. Baker. Elliot said Zachary is a librarian super star. Zachary gave his acceptance speech.

Dina started the installation ceremony, which was continued by Amalia Warshenbrot. The 2020-2022 Board was installed.

New AJL President Kathy Bloomfield called for the meeting to be adjourned. Jackie moved and Neil seconded. We are adjourned.

**SSCPL DIVISION MEETING**

Monday, June 29, 2020 12:30 to 2 pm EDT
Digital Conference
Meeting Notes
Submitted by Ellen Share

2018-2020 AJL Vice-President of SSCPL

Emily Bergman opened the virtual meeting on Monday, June 29th at 12:30 pm EDT. She related that for 26 years she had worked as a volunteer synagogue librarian and, also, has connections with ALA. The last year’s minutes were read. The minutes read by Emily were approved with one correction. Voting for minutes approval was done virtually and minutes passed with 40 yes votes.

Emily Bergman related the following. There is concern over librarians losing positions due to coronavirus, budget reductions, etc.

AJL Board meetings have been held every month, which led to greater productivity than limited to twice a year. AJL hired a Development Associate. Submit thoughts on projects that might be outside-funded and bring in money (attract donors) to Kathy Bloomfield. Thanks to OPALS Media for sponsoring our session.

Jerry Krautman will be hired for another year as Development Director. Jerry started talking to donors, but the coronavirus has hit. The budget continues to be at a deficit, and this is the issue when we talk about a dues increase. Hasafran has voted to remain an open listserv.

A thank you goes to the Convention Committee which worked hard and has done a great job. A special thank you goes to Lisa Silverman, Rachel Kamin, and Marcie Eskin.

Emily Bergman described her work with ALA (American Library Association) and EMIERT (Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Roundtable) as being part of an effort to give more visibility to AJL and Jewish books. Emily worked with EMIERT on a presentation by Heidi Rabinowitz and Sadaf Saddique, from KitaabWorld, to be given at ALA Annual. When the in-person convention was cancelled and moved to virtual, there was no room in the schedule for this panel. Instead, EMIERT wants us to create a webinar of the program. However, with the change to a virtual conference, the EMIERT Chair’s program for ALA changed. Heidi Rabinowitz agreed to be a speaker for the program in promoting multicultural books. ALA is now including AJL with diversity websites. Emily is hoping to continue to get more inclusion of Jewish books in EMIERT and has had some success.

Jerry Krautman, Development Associate, is working on membership enrollment and getting members to join earlier at the enrollment date.

**Groner Winkler Scholarship.** Heidi Rabinowitz was the winner of the scholarship this year. Next year, she will use it for attendance in Chicago, 2021. Heidi will give her acceptance presentation at next year’s SSCPL Division meeting. The Groner-Wikler Scholarship, sponsored by KarBen Publishing, awards a scholarship for attendance to AJL Conference. It is awarded to an AJL member who demonstrates dedication to Jewish children’s literature and Jewish library services.
Accreditation awards by Shaindy Kurzmann

Purpose of accreditation: 1. Elevates library in eyes of Board. 2. Adds credibility that the library is maintained in a professional manner. 3. Commits library to evaluating policy and collection. 4. Publicity for library.

The Library Accreditation Committee was Shaindy Kurzmann, Arlene Ratzabi, Cara Sagal, and Bruchie Weinstein.

Advanced Library Accreditation

Sean Boyle, Head Librarian and Educational Technology Specialist
The Jewish Day School Library and Media Center of the Jewish Day School of the Lehigh Valley; Allentown, PA

Essia Cartoon-Fredman, Librarian
The Lainer Library, Pressman Academy of Temple Beth Ami; Los Angeles, CA

Renewal of Basic Accreditation

Linda Rabinowitz, Academic Dean and Davida Levin (volunteer librarian and recently retired)
Torah Day School of Atlanta, Georgia

Shira Cohen, Librarian
Marian Renee Saltzberg Learning Resource Center/Irving Rubenstein Memorial Library of Congregation of Beth Shalom, IL

Advanced Accreditation Renewal

Stacy Brown, 21st Century Learning Coordinator, Lower School Library and Middle School Library
The Alfred and Adele Davis Academy, Atlanta, Georgia

Vice-President Report of SSCPL by Ellen Share

Ellen Share, Vice President, gave a report on Pinterest, which is a social media website she has been maintaining for AJL for one year. There are all kinds of activities and crafts on the website, and it is hoped that members will access the website and add pins and boards. The management of this website will be turned over. It is for Kathy Bloomfield and Sean Boyle to decide who will maintain it. The website is open to all.

Advocacy Committee report by Sean Boyle

The 18-month committee has met with some success. Patricia Givens attended NewCAJE last year to connect with educators and offer guidance and help with synagogue and school libraries.

With the challenges of the pandemic, knowing how to advocate takes on new meaning. There is the serious concern of libraries shutting down and lack of funding. These people have served on the committee: Sean Boyle, Chair, Patricia Givens, Rachel Glasser, Anjelica Ruiz, Amalia Warshenbrot, and Bruchie Weinstein. Sean spoke at NewCAJE last year and Ellen Share will speak this year at NewCAJE. The committee is working to forge relationships with NewCAJE and PRIZMAH (Jewish private school organization). An effort is being made to promote outreach with other educational institutions.

Sydney Taylor Manuscript Committee by Aileen Grossberg

No winner for this year. Unfortunately, the quality of the five submissions was well below our standards, although there were some redeeming features of one or two. The decision was unanimous. The authors will be encouraged to resubmit, if they wish, after reworking the manuscript. Each one was sent a critique based on the judges’ comments.

The existence of the Manuscript Award needs to be acknowledged. In Aileen’s effort to publicize the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award, she attended the Jewish Children’s Writers and Illustrators Conference sponsored by the Jewish Book Council.
Two members of the committee have served their terms of five years and will be leaving the committee. In early spring, notice was posted on Hasafran and in the AJL Bulletin for additional members.

**Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee by Rebecca Levitan**

Tomorrow, there will be a session with Sydney Taylor Awards and honor awards. Since the awards have been announced at the ALA Youth Media Awards, there has been an enormous increase in the sale of Sydney Taylor Award winning books. They are also announcing Honor Books at ALA.

Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee: Chair, Rebecca Levitan  
Outgoing members: Sylvie Shaffer, Shoshana Flax, Rivka Yerushalmi  
Incoming members: Aviva Rosenberg, Toby Harris, Judy Ehrenstein, Martha Simpson.

**Bibliography Bank by Laura Schutzman**

The Love Your Neighbor lists appear on Bibliography Bank. Laura is working on curating a collection of bibliographies and will put the link on the website.

**AJL Wiki by Laura Schutzman. No report.**

**Jewish Values Finder by Heather Lenson**

She was absent and sent her report, which Emily read. She said that the Values Finder was struggling and needs volunteers to add titles. She writes, “Unfortunately, I do not have great news. I struggle to maintain the Jewish Values finder.”

This resource created by Linda Silver needs volunteers to help enter titles. She proposes that when books are reviewed for the AJL News and Reviews, the reviewer adds the title to the Value Finder at the same time. She would like to work with the editor of AJL News and Reviews to coordinate this additional step.

**WEINE Users' Group by Arlene Ratzabi**

She needs suggestions and is not getting feedback. You are encouraged to add suggestions after the conference. Arlene is reclassifying her own library.

**Announcements by Susan Kussel and Heidi Rabinowitz**

Two new committees that have been approved.

1. Jewish Children’s Holiday Book Committee--To help provide guidance to newspapers, lists, etc. along with guidance for parents and teachers. The committee is set up to recommend holiday books and produce yearly lists for the fall and spring holidays. Susan and Heidi are looking for suggestions for a committee name.

2. Quick List—to produce book lists when there is a need to make a special list (for instance, pandemic). Qualified people need to make the list. This was approved by Council last night and is not fully staffed. Love Your Neighbor is to move to Quick List.

Emily Bergman reports roundtable discussions were successful in the spring.

**Some topics for future roundtables:**

1. eBooks. Experience with eBooks, including Overdrive (remark from Susan Dubin that Opals has an eBook component).
2. Our schedules as virtual librarians and in hybrid situations. Embedded school librarians.
3. Consortium negotiation for online resources.
4. Re-opening libraries post covid.
5. Acquisitions and cataloging synagogue library (practicality).
6. Volunteer librarians.
7. School and Synagogue librarians establish relationships with PRIZMAH.
Topics for Chicago conference in 2021

1. Funding as libraries are being eliminated--lack of funding, no funding, minimum funding.
2. What do college librarians need from school librarians and how can academic and school librarians work together to prepare students.
3. Successful library programs. What are the best practices and best programs?
5. Best practices for collaboration with teachers.

Other ideas for focus. New ideas

1. Public school teachers connect for instruction on how to teach Judaica before teaching courses on the subject.
2. Programs for public libraries. Programs for librarians. Librarians not in Jewish institutions but in public libraries.
3. Create and advertise programs on Zoom. Create a list of Zoom programs. Can be paid and free and to be distributed to libraries. Send list of Zoom programs to Lisa Silverman.
4. Create zoom instruction centers.

RAS DIVISION MEETING, JUNE 2020

The Research Libraries, Archives, and Special Collections (RAS) Division held its annual meeting online on Monday, June 29, 2020 during AJL’s digital conference. Updates and news included the following:

Cataloging Committee (updates by Heidi Lerner):

- Heidi has stepped down as chair, and Neil Frau-Cortes will be stepping up.
- The term of three additional committee members is ending. Replacements will be announced.
- Neil Frau-Cortes, Jasmin Shinohara, Caroline Miller and Sharon Benamou are working on the OCLC Merge Project that deals with duplicate records.
- Heidi Lerner, Jerry Anne, and Jasmin are involved in the PCC Linked Data Project, for non-Latin script in LD4P.
- Neil Frau-Cortes presented on his project (Portrait of the Call) on medieval authors in the Crown of Aragon.
- Heidi Lerner is working on Yiddish theatre posters.

Reference and Bibliography Committee (updates by Amalia S. Levi)

- This year’s reference and bibliography awards were announced with a press release.
- Amalia has stepped down as committee chair, since her term was over. The new Reference and Bibliography Awards Committee chair is the new RAS VP, Anna Levia, librarian at Stanford University.

Judaica Librarianship (updates by Rachel Leket-Mor)

- Rachel discussed the new issue that would be published full open access.

Resolution on Collection Development and Equity in the Time of Covid-19:

- Several associations (including SALALM and MELA) have issued statements drawing attention to budget cuts and the emphasis on eBooks, and expressed their concerns about these effects on collection development for area studies.
• An AJL committee was appointed to draft a resolution on behalf of AJL. Committee members were Rachel Leket-Mor, Amalia Levi, Sheryl Stahl and Chana Wolfson.

• AJL’s Statement on Collecting, Serving our Users, and Supporting Vendors in the Time Of Covid-19 has been approved, and has also been endorsed by the Association of Jewish Studies.

• With this statement, AJL has co-signed a joint statement by several other area studies associations about “Equity and Access in Higher Education and Academic Libraries Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic.”

Discussion:

• At the end of the meeting, members shared experiences in their institutions regarding COVID, such as working remotely, sanitizing material, providing books for patrons; the distinction between books and special collections material; digitized collections; use of crowdsourcing tools to engage with digital collections (e.g., FromThePage); ILL discussions, such as “ILL for Special Collections,” meaning scanning with certain page limits, and not a whole archival collection; precautions and measures as people start work again, and how policies are enforced; staff being furloughed or losing their jobs; institutions in financial difficulty, cutting back their budgets; and opportunities for collaborative collecting among others.

• Members also discussed activities they would like to see in the upcoming year. It was suggested that monthly virtual roundtables be theme-based. Some themes discussed were digitization workflows, funding, teaching with special collections, etc.

• RAS members also discussed the pros and cons of a physical vs. a virtual conference.

• Another idea was also that members can present their work or projects throughout the year.

• Finally, RAS members were invited to contribute to the new AJL mapping platform introduced by Neil Frau-Cortes, “Put your Library on the Map.” Please use this form to add your institution or collections.

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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.
## Financial Reports

### AJL Treasurer's Report
Midyear Meeting - January 20, 2020
For June 1, 2019-December 31, 2019

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<td>Bank of America savings</td>
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<td>Chase savings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Merrill-Lynch CDs</td>
<td>100,722.10</td>
<td>102,134.04</td>
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Balance as of June 1, 2019: $369,326.91

Balance as of Dec. 31, 2019: $281,655.69

### Income Received
Membership dues $18,320.
Late conference income $7794.90
Donations
- General $3012.
- Library school scholarship $208.
- Judy Cohn $230.
- Conference $1287.
- Publications $36.

Publications $2443.41
Interest and investments $792.60
Awards $10,500.
**Total income $44,623.91**

### Expenses Paid
National
- Insurance $986.89
- Merchant account fees $911.73
- PayPal fees $129.01
- Post office box and mailing $247.16
- Tech soup (QuickBooks) $50.
- Zoom $104.93
- Website $1800.
- Development Associate $10,500.
- Treasurer $194.13

Committees
- National Conference Committee $947.69
- Development Committee $644.98
- ALA Liaison $2260.71
- STBA Products $2213.84

Publications
- Judaica Librarianship $11,233.88
- Newsletter $406.52

Conf. 2019
- food and hotel $49,640.48
## AJL BUDGET OVERVIEW: FY 2021 - FY21 P&L

October 2020 - September 2021

### Revenue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A National Income</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1 Membership Dues</td>
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<tr>
<td>A2 Donations</td>
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<td>General Donation</td>
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<td>Annual Campaign</td>
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<td>President’s Fund</td>
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<td>Publications Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total A2 Donations</strong></td>
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<td>A3 Publications - Income</td>
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<td>Ads in Newsletter, JL</td>
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<td>Books, Guides</td>
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<td>Goodshop Website Royalties</td>
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<td>Membership Mailing Labels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Royalties</td>
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<td>STBA products</td>
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<td><strong>Total A3 Publications - Income</strong></td>
<td>8,170.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>A4 Bank and Investment Interest</td>
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<td>Bank Interest Income</td>
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<td>Investment Interest</td>
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<td><strong>Total A4 Bank and Investment Interest</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Groner-Wikler Stipend</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judy Cohn Conf. Support</td>
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<td>OPALS</td>
<td>2,500.00</td>
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<td>Rothschild</td>
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<td><strong>Total Conf. Support Donations</strong></td>
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<td>Jewish Fiction Award</td>
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<td>RAS Bibliography Award</td>
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<td>RAS Reference Book Award</td>
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<td><strong>Total C Awards</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Total Revenue</strong></td>
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### Gross Profit

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<td>Total Revenue</td>
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## Expenditures

A National Expenses

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<td>Bank Charges</td>
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<td>Development Assoc Exp</td>
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<td>Development Associate</td>
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<td>Insurance</td>
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<td>Merchant Account Fees</td>
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<td>Merrill-Lynch fees</td>
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<td>PayPal Fees</td>
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<td>Stationery, Supplies etc.</td>
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<td>Survey Monkey</td>
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<td>Tech Soup (QuickBooks)</td>
<td>50.00</td>
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<td>Zoom</td>
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<td><strong>Total A1 National Office</strong></td>
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<td>A2 Professional Dues</td>
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<td>American Library Assn</td>
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<td>Assn of Jewish Studies</td>
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<td><strong>Total A2 Professional Dues</strong></td>
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<td>A3 Professional Services</td>
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<td>A4 Publications - Expense</td>
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<td>Books, Guides</td>
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<td>Jewish Valuesfinder</td>
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<td>Judaica Librarianship</td>
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<td>Newsletter</td>
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<td>Proceedings</td>
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<td>STBA Products</td>
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<td>Website</td>
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<td><strong>Total A4 Publications - Expense</strong></td>
<td><strong>18,400.00</strong></td>
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<td>A5 Meetings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual Conf Bd and Council Food</td>
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<td>Midyear Meeting</td>
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<td>Midyear Meeting Food, Supplies</td>
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<td>Food</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplies</td>
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<td><strong>Total Midyear Meeting Food, Supplies</strong></td>
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<td>Midyear Meeting Hotel &amp; Travel</td>
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<td>Travel</td>
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<td><strong>Total Midyear Meeting</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Total A5 Meetings</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Amount</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
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<td>RAS President</td>
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<td>Secretary</td>
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<td>VP Membership</td>
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<tr>
<td>VP/President Elect</td>
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**Total A6 Executive Board** 4,400.00

- A7 Committees
  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<td>Archives</td>
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<td>Development</td>
<td>500.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liaisons</td>
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<td>Library Accreditation</td>
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<td>Library School Scholarship</td>
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<td>Member Relations</td>
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<td>Membership</td>
<td>100.00</td>
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<td>National Conference Committee</td>
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<td>Public Relations</td>
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**Total A7 Committees** 13,500.00

**Total A National Expenses** 91,680.00

- B Conference Expenses
  
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Expense</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AV and Podcasting</td>
<td>8,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conference Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>AJL Conference Support</td>
<td>18,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBSCO Conference Support</td>
<td>1,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groner-Wikler Conference Support</td>
<td>1,500.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judy Cohn Conference Support</td>
<td>250.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPALS</td>
<td>2,500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rothschild</td>
<td>6,536.50</td>
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**Total Conference Support** 29,786.50

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<td>Feinstein Lecture</td>
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<td>Hotel and Food</td>
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**Total Hotel and Food** 45,000.00

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<td>Supplies/other expenses</td>
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<td>Venue</td>
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**Total B Conference Expenses** 103,240.82

- C Awards - Expenses
  
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Award</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jewish Fiction Award</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAS Bibliography Award</td>
<td>1,500.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAS Reference Book Award</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Awards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sydney Taylor Book Award</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sydney Taylor Ms Award</td>
<td>1,500.00</td>
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**Total C Awards - Expenses** 15,000.00

**Total Expenditures** $209,920.82

**NET OPERATING REVENUE** $-72,409.32

**NET REVENUE** $-72,409.32
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 (sarmarbar68@gmail.com)
5646 Hunters Lake
Cincinnati, OH 45249

AJL Scholarship Donation Form

Name of Donor:
__________________________________________________________

Address and email of Donor:
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

Donation made in honor/memory of:
__________________________________________________________

Name of person(s) to receive card:
__________________________________________________________

Address of person(s):
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

Notes:
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

EDITED BY DANIEL SCHEIDE AND REBECCA JEFFERSON


Barromi-Perlman’s book is a collection of ten essays with photos on the photographing of family life on kibbutz in Israel from 1948-1967. The photographs were largely found in albums in kibbutz archives, the repositories of kibbutz history. The essays examine what the photographs tell us about socialism, family life on the kibbutz, and children. During this time, children lived in “children’s houses,” and the book examines and seeks to interpret the facial expressions and physical spacing of parents and children in the pictures. The essays point to the photographs as idealizing kibbutz life, which might not in reality be the case. The children’s houses were eventually closed because parents and children wanted to live together in the same house. This work will be of interest to both photographers and sociologists; it presents questions and issues that explore new ways of understanding how life on a kibbutz was viewed and documented.

Ellen Share, former Judaica librarian and religious educator, Potomac, MD


In this book, Judith Bleich, a professor of Jewish history at Touro University, delineates the history of the relationship between the Orthodox and Reform communities in Germany, France, the US, and elsewhere in the 19th and 20th (and 21st) centuries. This history includes well-known figures from the Orthodox community such as Samson Raphael Hirsch, Azriel Hildesheimer, Akiva Eger and others. There are also personages from the Reform movement, such as Isaac Mayer Wise, David Einhorn and others, whom Bleich quotes and analyzes extensively.

The foundations of the relationship set during this period of contention between the two groups continue to influence and shape the current situation between them. Bleich expertly demonstrates this by using many references and footnotes to connect current developments to the historical record she analyzes. One of the most interesting elements of this book is how both the Orthodox and Reform movements used newspapers and academic (and not-so academic) journals, in both German and Hebrew, to spread and reinforce their viewpoints and opinions. Bleich states that this aspect of this period in Jewish history, especially as it relates to the Orthodox newspapers and journals, is sorely lacking in academic studies. She also devotes a chapter to the history and development of liturgical changes and the potential impact of these changes on spirituality, and how the return to Hebrew on the part of Reform Judaism was meant to address these issues. The importance of Israel/Zion as both concept and reality is analyzed extensively, and how the differences between the groups on this issue widen and narrow and otherwise change over time is also very interesting.

This book is recommended for academic libraries that want to deepen their collection of materials dealing with the development of Reform and Orthodox Judaism, spirituality and religious history, religious studies, Zionism, and other topics of interest covered in the volume.

Eli Lieberman, Assistant Librarian, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, NY


The concept of justice in the West Bank is a complicated subject. What are the rights of terrorists? Do they have the same rights as a regular criminal or are their crimes so heinous they are not allowed those rights? How can they have a fair and reasonable trial and who is responsible, the Israeli establishment, or the Palestinian authority? Are minors allowed more leniency than an adult even if their crime is worse?
The answer to some of these questions is addressed in Yonah Jeremy Bob’s well-researched book, *Justice in the West Bank? The Israel-Palestinian Conflict Goes to Court*.

Mr. Bob, an attorney and former member of the IDF Legal Division, interviews four major players in this court system: chief prosecutor Maurice Hirsch, Defense Attorney Merav Khoury, defense attorneys Gaby Lasky and Nery Ramati, and former IDF West Banks Court Chief Justice Aharon Mishnayot. Through these players, the book attempts to answer what is the role of these West Bank Courts and how can they be judicially fair and just. Notable court cases that are mentioned are the prosecution and sentencing of the murderer of Ezra Schwartz, a Bostonian Yeshiva student killed in 2015, and the killer of the Fogel family in Itamar in 2011. The book also attempts to understand some of the judicial reforms that were discussed and enacted in 2016, especially for minors. This book is recommended for academic institutions but could be a welcome addition to school libraries as well.

*Laura Schutzman, AJL Jewish Fiction Award Committee Chair; AJL Publications Chair; Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY*


The sixth volume of *The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization* presents a unique gathering of primary, multi-faceted, diverse sources translated into English. Many of the works gathered here, in a wide range of formats including, memoirs, literature, intellectual history, pedagogy, scholarship and science, journalism, politics, visual and material culture (movies, artwork, drama, performing arts, opera, cultural materials), have never been available in the English language before.

Elisheva Carlebach characterizes the period covered in Volume 6 as “a time in which every aspect of Jewish life underwent the most profound changes to have occurred since antiquity.” This was a period of sea change, which witnessed changing political borders, momentous demographic shifts, Jewish migrations, and technological revolutions. The primary sources presented in this volume represent a span of responses to modernity from welcoming acculturation and assimilation to resistance, to intermediate strategies, to modern enlightenment and emancipation.

Interested readers will hear voices rarely included in Jewish culture, such as that of Roza, a multilingual Jewish midwife, and that of a Jewish soldier during the American Civil War; they will learn about the powerful religious music inspiring artists of today, and they will explore passionate Jewish debates on all sides of religious and political issues, like private property and the institution of slavery.

While no history can provide the fully inclusive totality of what Leopold van Ranke termed *wie est eigentlich gewesen war*, at least with this volume, the reader has a fairer chance to judge historical events for themselves from a much broader perspective. Highly recommended for all Jewish libraries.

*David B Levy, TC. LCW., NYC*


This massive publication seeks to gather Jewish print and visual materials from ancient times until the current date. The series began with Volume 10 which covered the late 20th century. Businessman Felix Posner had the audacious idea back in 2003 to anthologize Jewish creative works that illustrated Jewish life. He saw the idea of an anthology started with the Bible, Talmud and rabbinic literature and in modern times by encyclopedias and narrow anthology collections of literature, humor, history, etc. Posner was in contact with Jewish scholars from across the globe and drew on their expertise to put
these volumes together. What was created is a work that is neither encyclopedic nor focused. By trying to gather a wide range of materials, the editors merely give a taste and provide nothing for analysis.

This is a series that has no audience. It is not useful for an undergraduate course because there is no focus. It is not for a graduate student because the sources are too limited. It is not for an adult learner because the selections don’t have enough context to hold the readers’ interest.

A recommendation is therefore difficult. This volume in the series is very well done, and each selection has a scholarly introduction including biographical information on the author. But it’s too big for recreational reading and too limited for scholarly reading, and the purchase of the book is costly. For these reasons, it is an optional acquisition for school, synagogue and personal collections. Academic collections will probably want this for readers who want to provide a quick reference guide to a variety of Jewish sources.

Daniel Stuhlman, City Colleges of Chicago, Temple Sholom of Chicago


Inspired by the writings of Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg and those of a number of Modern Orthodox contemporaries, a group of sixteen scholars gathered in Oxfordshire in 2014 for the first Oxford Summer Institute on Modern and Contemporary Judaism. The results of their discussions are presented in the pages of this volume. The scholars’ purpose was to “rigorously and critically” examine the work of Greenberg and his divergence from the trajectory of Modern Orthodox Judaism.

The book begins with an autobiographical essay in which Greenberg describes the evolution of his own conceptualization of Modern Orthodoxy. He describes how he arrived at new insights reconciling Orthodox belief with a certain “pluralism” which sought compromise with contemporary society. He notes, however, that in Haredi circles his views were aggressively rejected. Haredi leaders saw them as undermining the idea that Orthodox Judaism had the only true path to revelation. Seven of the remaining twelve essays explore Greenberg’s “covenantal theology,” his embrace of religious pluralism, and his understanding of revelation. The last five essays consider Modern Orthodoxy as a phenomenon, the meaning of the term “Modern Orthodox,” its demographics, where it might be heading, and how it might be changing. This work provides an excellent introduction to the critical issues surrounding Modern Orthodoxy’s encounter with the rapidly changing contemporary world. In the words of another reviewer (Eugene Korn, *Jewish Press*), it is “scholarly yet accessible, critical yet constructive, and focused yet with broad sensibility.”

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante


Isaiah Gafni is a master in his field and this collection of articles from his long and fruitful career are a treat to the interested reader in the history and historiography of rabbinic (and pre-rabbinic) Jews and Judaism. Part One of the book looks at rabbinic historiography and how images of the past are projected on to the present in Hellenistic, rabbinic, and Geonic literature. Part Two focuses on the formative era of Babylonian Jewry. Part Three discusses Jewish self-identity, specifically as it relates to the Israel/diaspora relationship. Part Four describes how modern ideologies and discoveries are involved in how we perceive images of the past.

In this valuable collection of articles, the reader gains from Gafni’s wide expertise and mastery of this era. Just to take five examples from the twenty-four articles in this collection, we learn about: how Joseph
reworks Maccabees to further his own worldview and goals; how the Rabbis’ use and refashion the “memory” of the Maccabees; how the general intellectual environment influenced both Jewish and non-Jewish rabbinic instruction rather than the influence coming from the latter on the former; the changes attributed to the Land of Israel in the aftermath of the failed Bar Kochba revolt; and the divergence of legal and cultural norms between the Judean and diaspora communities.

For the interested layperson and academic, one could do no better than study Gafni’s work to learn more about rabbinic Jews and Judaism from ancient times through the Geonic era.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel


The Believer and the Modern Study of the Bible is an important work for those interested in examining the modern study of the Bible through the eyes of Orthodox writers. Perhaps the most important part of this work is the first 190 pages that provide an anthology of traditional sources that problematize and complicate simplistically held notions of “Torah from Sinai.” These primary sources are all derived from mainstream Orthodox thought and their collection and organization in this book is quite useful.

The remainder of the book consists of a series of twenty articles that discuss different aspects of biblical criticism and Orthodoxy. As the reader makes his or her way through these essays, it immediately becomes clear whether the essay is written by an academic or a Rabbi/religious teacher, as each comes to the discipline with different expertise and ultimate aims.

Ironically, the book is sure to please very few people. The traditional reader will encounter significant challenges to traditional Orthodox dogma about the provenance of the Mosaic Torah. With a few notable exceptions (Brettler, Ross and Sommer), the academic-minded reader will find a deeply apologetic book that fails to confront the obvious fault lines separating traditional dogma and academic scholarship. Some of the apologetics ring hollow (Aster, Cherlow), and some are more interesting and subtly done, even if wholly unconvincing (Brandes, Bigman).

The Believer and the Modern Study of the Bible is an important and accessible collection of articles. For the traditional Orthodox Jew, curious about the “modern Study of the Bible,” this is a highly recommended first work. The book also provides fascinating insights into areas of religious culture and sociology—demonstrating the varied intellectual scaffolding being constructed to bridge two disciplines that are often at odds.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel


David Richard Goldberg finished his book, with the help of his son Zachary Goldberg, just before his passing away on October 3, 2016. The idea came to him following a trip to Israel and he was encouraged to write by his many friends and associates. The book is divided into four main parts by historical period: 1. Ancient Times—Rabbi Akiva, Queen Esther; 2. Early American Wars—Haym Salomon, Uriah Phillips Levy; 3. Holocaust—Felix Zandman, Simon Wiesenthal; 4. State of Israel—Theodor Herzl, Ze’ev Jabotinsky, David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Menachem Begin.

The author intended his work to be easily understood, a sort of “talking book” from person to person. Indeed, Amazing Jewish Heroes is a highly readable account of a group of important individuals whose biographies have been covered comprehensively elsewhere. Nevertheless, Goldberg still manages to enhance one’s knowledge about the aforementioned heroes by providing many new and interesting insights into their lives and struggles. This is a worthy acquisition for public libraries and all Jewish libraries.

Gematria is a kabalistic interpretation of the Bible. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is given a numerical value; for example, *aleph* corresponds to one, *bet* corresponds to two, and so on. Dr. Hardiman, a convert to Judaism, has spent over twenty-five years using gematria to interpret the Hebrew Bible. In his book, Hardiman points out the similarities of gematria to Hindu, Buddhist, and shamanistic philosophies, and he shows how the numerical value of words can connect them to other words, phrases and sentences in the Bible, thereby presenting a deeper meaning to the text. The study of gematria, he asserts, will bring the reader closer to the truth.

The book is written in three parts. Part I describes gematria as Hebrew letters that not only correspond to numbers, but are matched to pictorial symbols as well. In the text, Hebrew passages are written in italics and the numerical values and corresponding numbers are analyzed in depth. The analogies are cumbersome and difficult to follow even for someone comfortable with Hebrew and versed in the Bible. Part II interprets each *parashah* (portion) in the book of Genesis using gematria and pictorial symbolism. The author refers to the ancient use of the swastika as a “sacred symbol in tantric rituals in the Indus Valley about 2500 BCE,” a symbol which was later appropriated and abused by the Nazis. The symbolism of the Christian cross is also analyzed in depth. Part III discusses the Hebrew calendar and holidays. Three appendices, three tables, and an index are included. Not recommended for most Jewish libraries; however, an academic library might consider this book as an alternate selection.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, Ohio


This is a compilation of fourteen academic case studies of Jewish radical individuals, groups, ideas, and one film. They are divided into political, religious, and cultural and include both left-wing and right-wing radicals. Indeed, the range is deliberately so broad that one may wonder if they can be thought of as actually manifesting one phenomenon. The editors wish to encourage academic research and discussion of Jewish radicalism and believe the broad range will help do so. Essays on the more consequential radicalisms include, in part, one on Abba Ahimeir, arguably the originator of revolutionary Zionism that eventually fought the British in order to establish a Jewish state in the Land of Israel, and one on Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, founder of the Jewish Renewal movement and an advocate of the use of psychedelics for mystical purposes. One of the most intriguing chapters, “Radical Trinity,” discusses the process of radicalization of many Jews in New York City and the relationship to Eastern European Jewish radicalism. The audience for this tome is likely to be relatively small and specialized.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University, Washington, DC


Professor Kasher analyses the ideas of fifteen Jewish scholars, chronologically from Sa’adia Gaon (882-942) to Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995). This important book is focused on facilitating a clearer and better understanding of the philosophical implications and intentions behind the characterization of the Jewish people as the “chosen” nation. Certainly, there is lots of room for misunderstanding when words like
“above” and “chosen” are applied to someone else or another nation. Each chapter is dedicated to one scholar and each chapter ends with a short summary of the scholar’s ideas and how he applies them to the life of the Jewish people among the world’s nations.

The book has a clear title page and table of contents (in Hebrew and English). It has a nice dedication, introduction, bibliographic abbreviations, and a personalities index.

*Above All Nations* is appropriate as an acquisition for academic and larger or regional public libraries that deal with the subject of Judaism and the Jewish People. It is written in clear readable language. Hopefully the book will be translated into other languages; the tragic consequences of the subject’s historical misunderstanding means its relevance extends well beyond the domain of academic philosophers.

Nira G. Wolfe, Independent researcher, Highland Park, IL; Head Librarian Hebrew Theological College (retired), Skokie, IL


Kenden Alfond, who compiled this cookbook, also maintains the “Jewish Food Hero” website. Her goal is to encourage members of the Jewish community to improve their health and mood through adding more plant-based foods to their diet and to make the entire Jewish community more aware of the impact of their food choices on the environment and climate change. It is a wonderful cookbook, especially if you are a vegetarian or planning to do vegetarian cooking. The recipes are kosher and parve. They were contributed by forty Jewish women who are part of Jewish Food Hero Network. The contributors paired their recipes with twenty biblical women. The biblical women are described in the cookbook along with reasons for the pairings. This reviewer tried a number of the recipes and especially delicious was Ludmilla’s Cauliflower and Bean Soup. Alfond’s cookbook is a great choice for anyone interested in healthy cooking and making vegetarian recipes.

Ellen Share, retired librarian & Judaica educator, Potomac, MD


The author is a professor of systematic theology and has written additional books in the area of theology. The book begins with an introduction which explains the need for comparative theology in the wake of the growth of religious faith around the world. Following are ten chapters, each describing a different area of religious faith, such as divine revelation, creation, humanity, communities of faith, and eschatology. The presentation of the book appears to be a survey of various beliefs and how they compare among the various faith communities, including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. In the epilogue, the author summarizes the method of comparison as an example of proper confidence. This is described as akin to Wittgenstein’s argument that comparative theology cannot be neutral but requires religious conviction within its perspective.

The book includes a bibliography and index of terms. The author’s own perspective is clearly Christian and he devotes chapters to Christology, Trinity, and Incarnation. The book could make a good textbook for an introductory theology course in a Christian program of study but is not recommended for a Jewish library.

Arthur G. Quinn, St. Vincent de Paul Seminary, Boynton Beach, FL
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults


With longer life expectancy, people are entering a new phase of life to which they are unaccustomed. It can be a time of retiring from careers and from the world, or it can be a time of embracing new ideas and activities. In Part One, “From the Hidden Age to the Wisdom Years,” Lanir discusses his research, both formal and informal, about his personal challenges with navigating the new period of his life. In Part Two, “Towards a Theory of the Wisdom Years,” several studies of brain development are presented. Lanir posits that “functional age, quality of life and life expectancy are determined, to a large extent, by the synergy that exists between our four personal dimensions – the cognitive, the emotional, the physical and the social.” Part Three, “Enjoying the Wisdom Years,” tells the reader about the physical and mental habits that will make the post-retirement years a vital time instead of a way station before convalescence. Lanir first underwent “individuation — the process by which one becomes aware of the various interior aspects of their make-up and integrates them into a new functional entity. Practicing these principles since his sixty-seventh birthday, Lanir is in his eighty-second year, and going strong, proving that “a person can age without becoming old.”

Dr. Lanir is the founding president of the Praxis Institute and a graduate of Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He has been conducting research on aging for the past fifteen years. A verse from Proverbs is quoted in the text, and Lanir notes that Jewish tradition calls for respect of elders and appreciation of their knowledge and experience. There is no other Jewish content. The book is a very personal one, combining the research and techniques the author used to improve his own “wisdom years.” An optional purchase for libraries that serve patrons approaching and in retirement.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Loewenthal is the director of the Chabad Research Unit within the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London, and a Chabad Hasid himself. Becoming active in the movement as an adult, he is among the several followers whom the seventh and final Chabad ‘Rebbe,’ Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, encouraged to continue in their academic pursuits. This work, based on compilations of previous and new material, thus brings in the perspectives of a participant observer in the Chabad-Lubavitch world.

In his lengthy introduction the author shares with readers his own family background and personal and professional path to Chabad and Chabad research, including the events and mentors that inspired him on the way. The text itself contains eleven chapters which address four general topics: the development of Chabad’s emphasis on outreach and its attitudes towards ‘others’ in contrast to other Hassidic movements; Chabad theosophy and how it incorporates rationality into spirituality; the importance of women’s education and activism, particularly in the latter half of the 20th century; and messianism and the future of Chabad after R. Schneerson’s passing in 1994.

This is not an introductory work. Readers should have some knowledge in Jewish history and cabballistic thought to fully appreciate it. Footnotes, annotations, and an extensive bibliography provide guides to further sources and information. Recommended for academic libraries supporting Jewish or religious studies and adult readers in synagogue libraries.

Diane Mizrachi, PhD. Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California Los Angeles

Wissenschaft des Judenthums is the scholarly study of Judaism 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 judged Wissenschaft des Judenthums as the supreme form of German-Jewish self-expression. From the outset, the movement set high standards of philological and historiographical research, and today’s rigorous, diverse, and global academic study of Judaism, Jewish history, and Jewish texts is its legacy. Yet, if you would ask a college student in Jewish studies today what they know of Wissenschaft des Judenthums sadly, almost no one would know what you are talking about.

This book, while fascinating, is a challenging read and not intended as an introduction to the subject. Many of the footnoted sources are in German and difficult to access. Thus, the work is primarily 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. Highly recommended for academic collections.

Daniel Stuhlman, City College of Chicago, Temple Sholom


In her previous books, My 15 Grandmothers (CreateSpace 2012) and How I Found My 15 Grandmothers: A Step by Step Guide (CreateSpace 2014), Genie Milgrom tells her story. She was born in Havana, Cuba to a Roman Catholic family of Spanish origin. She converted to Orthodox Judaism when she was in her thirties. She researched her genealogy and “found an unbroken maternal lineage going back twenty-two generations to 1405 pre-Inquisition Spain and Portugal.” Many years later, her mother gave her old books full of handwritten recipes, none of which mixed milk and meat. She went through the recipes, admiring the handwriting and the measurements like “an egg full of oil,” and then had friends and family adapt and test the recipes. She realized that several “family traditions” were actually Jewish practices, such as checking for blood spots in eggs. The result is a collection of recipes for chicken dishes, meat dishes, fish, side dishes, sauces, beverages, and lots of desserts. Notes include level of difficulty, whether it is dairy, meat, or pareve, and whether it can be kosher for Passover. Additionally, Milgrom talks about the history of the recipe (from which grandmother it originated), and the person who volunteered to test it. Many of the recipes include ingredients native to the Zamora province of Spain like anise, almonds, and olives and olive oil. Some are classics like Sofrito, an onion and pepper base for many dishes; and Cocido Madrileño, a flavorful stew reminiscent of adafina or cholent, but made with kosher meat instead of pork. The desserts use a lot of eggs and anise. An index and glossary are included, as well as a common measurement conversion.

In the age of high production with bold color photographs, this collection with no pictures has its own charm. A family tree, maps of where the family lived, and pictures of some of the handwritten recipes would have provided more context for the book. Recommended for libraries whose patrons are interested in the history and culture of Crypto-Jews, as well as those that collect cookbooks.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Author Vanessa L. Ochs is a Rabbi and Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia. Based on her teaching and research, she presents the history and life of the Haggadah from its origins to the present moment. After a useful introduction, which puts the story of this key, sacred
book in perspective, six chapters cover early sources, illuminated Haggadot of the Middle Ages, the printed Haggadah, twentieth century variations, and Haggadot of Darkness, including those from the Holocaust. The last chapter discusses the great variety and diversity of twenty-first century Haggadot. The book contains just nine small black and white illustrations, as well as a glossary, a detailed index and resources (both print and online). Extensive notes are supplied for each chapter, mentioning additional valuable sources. The question, why so many Haggadahs, first raised in the introduction, becomes clear after reading this lively, interesting narrative. It is an important contribution to Jewish history, ritual and practice, recommended for high school, academic, community center, public and synagogue library collections. It is part of a large interfaith series that examines texts from great religious traditions around the world, exploring historical origins, interpretations and changes over time.

Susan Freiband, Volunteer Synagogue Librarian and Retired Library Educator, Alexandria, Virginia


This is the first monograph on the subject of Yiddish in Israel, and it is comprehensive, moving from the earliest days of the Jewish state to the present. The author’s goal is to challenge the notion that the state of Israel formally suppressed the use of Yiddish. Instead, she builds a case for Hebrew’s dominance mainly through hegemony, with local efforts to control Yiddish that were either protested, ignored, or subverted. In fact, official Israel often fostered Yiddish in its attempt to become the world center for Jewish culture.

The book is divided into sections that describe the major presence of Yiddish in Israel’s history: the Yiddish press; the theater, including notes about the Burstein family, Ida Kaminska, and the comedy duo of Dzigan and Shumacher; formal promotion of Yiddish literature through the support and elevation of Avrom Sutskever; the gathering of other writers into the group known as Yung Yisroel; and the triumph of Itsik Manger and the production of his *Di megile* in 1965. Rojanski offers an analysis of the tensions over the years between the needs to “negate the diaspora,” to treat *aliyah* as “immigrating home,” to make Israel the “nodal center” of the Jewish world, and to balance the idea of the melting pot with the natural impulse toward nostalgia. It’s especially interesting to read her documentation of Israeli characterizations of Yiddish as a “language of jokes,” “funny,” and “ridiculous” ideas which are surprisingly similar to American views. Rojanski’s thorough research is astonishing. Almost every paragraph of the book contains a footnote. There is a lengthy bibliography and an index. Recommended for academic libraries and Yiddish-oriented collections.

Beth Dwoskin, Judaica cataloger, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI


This book of six essays evolved from a lecture series that was “designed to introduce the public to both the similarities and the differences between the psychoanalytic and the Jewish world views.” All were presented by practitioners, and each piece is introduced by Dr. Schwartz. In “Insight and Tradition: The Enlightenment, Psychoanalysis and the Jews,” Eli Zaretsky addresses the question of whether there is something Jewish about psychoanalysis. He posits that “for Freud, Judaic monotheism had an affinity with psychoanalysis, not in the sense that Freud incorporated ‘Jewish ideas’ into analysis, but in the sense that both were difficult and even ascetic practices subject to vulgarization and distortion as they took a popular form.” He also discusses Freud and Jung’s association, and how they parted over differences rooted in religion. Stephen Frosh spoke about “Forgiveness in Judaism and Psychoanalysis.” In the context of Jewish atonement and repentance, “what kind of actions demand forgiveness, and what kind can be forgiven?” Can some actions never be forgiven? Sander L. Gilman explores whether
male hysteria is solely a “Jewish neurosis” in “Sigmund Freud, The Jewish Body, and Hysteria.” He looks at whether it is hereditary or a result of trauma and if Jews are predisposed to it because of their history of persecution. In “Unconscious Communication, Psychoanalysis, and Religious Experience,” Marsha Aileen Hewitt concludes that Freud became “the other” because he did not believe in mystical or spiritual psychoanalysis. The parallels of Zionism and Psychoanalysis, both “born” in Vienna is the subject of “Psychoanalysis in Israel: Trauma, Anti-Semitism, and Victimization” by Eran Rolnik. Finally, “A Talmudist and a Psychoanalyst Encounter a Talmud Tale,” by Ruth Calderon and Harvey Schwartz, looks at the rabbi and his “wife for a night” as if they were analysands. An index is included.

All of the articles are followed by notes and many sources. Because they are adapted from lectures, they are more engaging than most scholarly papers. The book is recommended for libraries whose patrons are interested in Freud, psychoanalysis, or Jewish involvement and influence in science and medicine.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


In *Rewriting the Talmud*, Marcus Schwartz aims to show how two rabbinic traditions from Palestine (from c.290-320 and also later in the fourth century) influenced extended passages in the Babylonian Talmud (BT) tractate Rosh Hashanah. Schwartz attempts to trace the dynamics of this influence and account for the mark it left in BT Rosh Hashanah. Schwartz engages in textual redactional detective sleuthing to show how parallel passages were reworked to fit that of the Jerusalem Talmud (the *Yerushalmi*) in a later period so that certain sugyot (discursive passages) in BT Rosh Hashanah are both like and unlike the Yerushalmi. The parallel highlighted appendices in this volume provide eloquent and stunning scientific proof of the process of authorial influence that would make the most adept practitioners of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (science of Judaism) proud. What is revealed is that all creative endeavor, including the redaction of the Babylonian Talmud, is collaborative, affirming Michel Foucault’s insightful question: *Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?* Highly recommended for upper level academic libraries.

David B Levy, Touro College LCW NY


Rabbi Dr. Yitzhak (Isadore) Twersky (1930-1997) descended from a noted Chassidic family and taught at Harvard. As the rabbi of Congregation Beth David (Talner Beis Midrash) in Boston, he would give a dvar Torah (Torah exposition) at Shalosh Seudos every week. After Shabbos, Rabbi Shapiro “recorded brief, distillatory notes, which have provided the basis for this sefer.” For some parshas (Torah portions), there is one dvar Torah; for others there are quite a few. They are arranged in the order of the verses analyzed, with a list of the years of presentation in an appendix at the back of the book. Each has been given a title by the editor and starts with the verse from the weekly Torah reading. They include the commentaries and sources to which Rabbi Twersky referred to make his points. The small volume is packed with precious gems. In a selection for Parshas VaYetzvi, which discusses why the angels are ascending and descending, instead of descending and ascending, Rabbi Twersky points out that “the upshot of these interpretations is that our actual selves are measured against our ideal selves.” Looking at Jacob’s blessings for his sons (Parshas VaYechi), some of which were harsh words, Rabbi Twersky notes that “we might suggest that tochachah (reproof) which seeks to inspire teshuvah (repentance) is itself a berachah (blessing). In an analysis of verses about the Sabbath (Parshat Ki Sisa), Rabbi Twersky concludes that “one’s experience of Shabbos is thus a reflection of how he has spent the week.” Also included are divrei Torah on the special parshas read in the month of Adar, and an index of sources cited.
Shapiro notes that while Rabbi Twersky’s lectures at Harvard were “expansive, comprehensive and explicit,” these *divrei Torah* were presented “in a terse and allusive manner.” As such, they are no longer than four pages, including the source material. The reader must have a basic background in Torah study and be familiar with commentators like Rashi, Rambam, and Ramban. Their brevity and insightfulness are perfect for sharing at a Sabbath meal, and provide a basis for further study for those so inclined. An excellent choice for Orthodox libraries and homes.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


After an overview, preface, and author biographies, the book is divided into two sections. The first “is focused primarily on sexual orientation, highlighting the challenges faced primarily by gay and lesbian members of the Orthodox Jewish world.” It begins with an article by the editors, “Does God Make Referrals?,” which discusses the role of the psychotherapist when addressing same-sex feelings in the Orthodox community, and questions whether rabbis would make referrals to therapists for other issues. Other essays explore how the challenges of an LGBT person can affect family, friends, and the community, and how rabbis can best support LGBT congregants. Jeremy Novich describes his doctoral dissertation on “Gay Jewish Men in the Orthodox Jewish Community” and Miryam Kabakov explores the role of parents in their children’s experiences. Rabbi Steven Greenberg proposes a ceremony with language more akin to a business *shutafut* (partnership) for same-sex marriages, and Elaine Chapnik analyzes the “Jewish Laws of Lesbians.” These essays are presented in clear language. While pointing out issues and problems, there are many suggestions as to how to address them, including lists of organizations that offer support and guidance (Eshel, JQYouth, etc.). The second section “focuses primarily on gender identity.” Anne Fausto-Sterling compares different approaches to gender development, looking at the factors that influence gender identity. Oriol Poveda summarizes the findings of his doctoral dissertation in “Negotiating Gendered Religious Practices Among Transgender Jews with an Orthodox Jewish Background.” Benjamin M. Baader and Joy Ladin talk about their lives pre/during/ and post transition. The final two essays deal with rabbinic opinions and helping transgender Jews be part of the community. A detailed index is included.

“Intended as a resource for those who are navigating the complicated terrain of religious and sexual identities,” it is highly recommended for Jewish Family Service resource centers, as well as Jewish libraries that serve the LGBTQIA2S+ community and its allies.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


*Mayer Matalon* describes the life and contributions of a popular Jamaican. As a businessman and government official, he was both widely admired and considered a controversial figure in Jamaican history. Descended from a Jamaican family, Matalon rose to be an adviser to Prime Ministers, held official and unofficial positions, and formed conglomerates and subsidiary businesses run by him and members of his family. He was involved heavily in telecommunications and banking and is remembered for handling foreign negotiation over bauxite. He was praised for successfully building moderate priced housing and coming up with innovative mortgage financing for the working class. As in the case of many family owned businesses, family conflicts arose in the 1980s and 90s, and the business declined. By the third generation, very few of the original family members lived in Jamaica. An interesting book for anyone wishing to learn more about Caribbean history, particularly the social and political history of the Jews in this area.

Ellen Share, retired librarian & Judaica educator, Potomac, MD
Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults


With the beginnings of agricultural settlement in Palestine, the question arose how Jewish law would respond to the practical challenges of a modern state. The parameters of the debate were set during the Shemita debate of 1889. Rabbi Naftali Yehuda Berlin, the Netziv, ruled that farmers should obey all the laws in full and their crops would be blessed in the sixth year as spelled out by the Torah. Other rabbis, fearing the economic consequence for the struggling farms, devised the halachic dispensation to sell the land to a gentile. Asaf Yedidya, a historian at Efrata College and Ariel University, offers a comprehensive chronological study of the interpretive attempts by modern rabbinical authorities, legal theorists, and Judaica scholars to formulate the role that halacha would play in the modern state from the pre-state period, through the founding of the state, and up to the 1960s.

On one side were rabbis who felt the halacha should serve as the constitutional law of the land and Israel should be a theocratic state. On the other side were rabbis who felt that Jewish law had to change to meet the challenges of the new state. Yedidya focuses on a number of key disputes: the status of non-Jews in the land of Israel, the role of women, the separation of religion and state, democracy and halachic decision making, and the place of observance of Judaism in the public sphere and the army.

Yedidya could have presented a deeper examination of the role of Israeli politics and sociology in these decisions. The translation from Hebrew is often inelegant. Overall, this book is a valuable addition to the growing literature on the challenge of halacha in a modern Jewish state. Recommended for academic libraries with Israel studies collections.

*Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA*

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In the 1970s, large numbers of Jews were allowed to leave the Soviet Union. In this book, we trace the journey of Boris (and his kitten) along with a handful of other characters from Odessa to Italy and eventually to the United States. He is coached and encouraged through long letters by his friend Ilya who had moved to the U.S. earlier. From the Odessa side, we learn about life in the Soviet Union and the perilous process of applying to leave. Since the government will only allow emigration for the purpose of reuniting families, each person had to find someone in Israel to claim as a relative. For the nebishy Yurik, that meant convincing his ex-wife to take him back so that he could take advantage of her connections. The travelers went from Odessa to Italy where they would presumably make arrangements to go to Israel, although many chose to go to the U.S. or other destinations instead.

From Ilya, we hear about the cultural delights and challenges of living in the United States. When Ilya is pulled over for driving too slowly, he is not beaten or extorted by the cop! On the other hand, when he gets a job, he is expected to put effort into the work and to be grateful for the opportunity. While his letters are sometimes a little long and pedantic, they are a fascinating examination of the acculturation process for Soviet Jews.

While the writing is sometimes a little awkward, the characters are diverse and interesting, and their journey is remarkable. Recommended.

*Sheryl Stahl, Director, Frances-Henry Library, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles*

Roza and her five-year-old daughter, Shira, are hiding from the Nazis in a Polish farmer’s barn. They must remain silent and invisible. This is difficult for a young child. To distract her, Roza, creates an imaginary world with a yellow bird that sings. Since Shira is very musical, she creates songs in her head inspired by the bird. When it becomes too dangerous to hide in the barn, the farmer’s wife arranges for Shira to be hidden by nuns in a convent. Roza joins a band of partisans in the forest, but vows to find Shira as soon as it is safe to do so. This beautifully written novel captures the desperation of wartime parenthood and the strength of both parents and children in horrific conditions. Shira, with the help of the nuns and a violin teacher, develops her amazing talent. Her mother rediscovers love while fighting for her life. This story will inspire readers. It raises questions about choices made during adversity and demonstrates the sustaining power of music. It will appeal to both adults and young adults and it is an excellent choice for book groups.

*Barbara Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA*


It was a simple plan, really. When David Zelig is cheated out of his family’s business by an antisemitic executive, he comes up with a scheme. He and his friends will form the Elders of Zion based on the fake group and use it to combat anti-Semitism. It goes smoothly for about ten minutes when they inadvertently get caught up with a Muslim terrorist group. But things don’t really spiral out of control until the Knights of Templar, the CIA, and the FBI come into the picture, not to mention stolen Fabergé eggs, Jesus’ foreskin, and true love.

If your library needs a humorous, mad-cap thriller, this book is highly recommended.

*Sheryl Stahl, Director, Frances-Henry Library, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles*

**Reviews of Multimedia**


Aviva Chernick offers an interesting mix of Sephardic melodies, traditional songs, and an original composition. Many of the selections were written by Flory Jagoda, the queen of Sephardic and Ladino music, as well as Bosnian ballads, with whom Chernick studied. While her voice is clean and clear, it doesn’t have the depth of emotion with which Jagoda laments her ancestors’ exiles. The exception is the bright “Laz Tiyas.” The lively tune and the combination of female voices (performed with Maryem Tollar) captures the excitement of being with the “aunties” for the Jewish holidays. Chernick’s original composition, “Min HaMeitzar,” is upbeat, but at the same time meditative, reminiscent of a chant accompanied by a catchy percussion beat. “Kol Dodi,” in which words from the Song of Songs is put to music composed by the Alter Rebbe of Lubavitch (Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi) is slow and haunting, as are most of the songs on the CD. The liner notes include descriptions of each selection, as well as Chernick’s connection to them. The Ladino songs include English translations, and the Hebrew songs include Hebrew, English transliteration, and English translation. Recommended for libraries that collect in the following areas: music, women, Spanish/Ladino, Canadian artists.

*Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel*
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Set at the time of the Spanish Inquisition, this historical novel highlights the events leading to the expulsion of Spain’s Jews and explores many related issues. Loma Corcia is seven-years-old as the story begins, but she matures quickly as events unfold and heavy responsibility is thrust upon her. She is proud of her Jewish heritage and fiercely protective of her family, especially her young nieces and nephews, and looks forward to someday having a family of her own. Her grandfather is a wealthy Jewish businessman who collects the taxes levied on the Jews and submits them to Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand while serving as advisor to the royal court. He begins to depend on her as his primary aide and companion. They travel across Spain attempting to be advocates for their people while proving their loyalty to the powerful and capricious monarchs. A diverse cast of vividly drawn characters inhabit Loma’s world including siblings, a faithful Muslim servant, and various members of the royal court including Isabella and Ferdinand’s young daughter. Levine, in an afterword and in interviews, explains that the grandfather’s character is loosely based on the historical figure of Isaac Abravenel, who had a similar role in fifteenth century Spain. The book also includes a glossary and a recipe for Sephardic eggs.

Loma’s unusual political access, in combination with the strictures and limitations faced by women and Jews of her day, presents an interesting study reflecting not only her own era but also echoes themes which resonate throughout Jewish history up to and including our own time. Anti-Semitism, pressure to assimilate into the dominant society, choices for women between marriage and career, and a raging plague, all strike contemporary chords connecting Loma’s world with our own. The detailed introduction as well as the author’s note at the end of the book highlight many of these issues and provide historical background and context. This is a complex tale presented in a richly detailed but easy to understand format and is absolutely not to be missed.

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


Will Levine is having a very difficult seventh grade experience. As a budding reptile expert (herpetologist), with several turtles he collected now living in his bedroom, and a self-described “funny-looking chin,” which he attempts to hide by ducking into his hoodie (like a turtle), he has become the target of the school bullies. They and his schoolmates have dubbed him “Turtle Boy.” When Will tells his mother how uncomfortable he is about his chin, she consults a doctor. It turns out that Will has micrognathia, and must have surgery to correct the problem so that his breathing and eating will not be affected.
In The Spotlight

However, Will’s father died following a routine hernia operation when Will was four, making him terrified of hospitals. Because he has been skillfully and deliberately avoiding his Bar Mitzvah community service project, Will’s rabbi has “ordered” him to befriend RJ, a young boy who is dying, requiring weekly visits to the hospital, and triggering some early childhood memories Will did not think he had. While all of this is going on, what more could one seventh grade boy have to deal with? RJ has a bucket list, and after a rocky beginning, RJ and Will get down to the business of Will serving as RJ’s proxy in making sure the list is completed. Despite his constant state of anxiety, and a never ending desire to sit alone in his room, Will finds himself getting on a bus and seeing a live rock concert, attending a school dance, riding a rollercoaster and playing drums in a school talent show, among many other things. Will manages to overcome his anxieties and learn, with the help of family and friends, that life is meant to be lived in all its fullness.

The writing in this fun and compassionate story is strong, with well-defined characters and interesting and engaging plot lines. Tears and laughter, empathy and acceptance are experienced deeply as emotions are touched. Judaism is a central theme of the book with the values of friendship, visiting the sick, compassion, and caring for the environment exemplified throughout.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL President; Blogger at forwordsbooks.com, Seal Beach, CA

BIBLE STORIES AND MIDRASH


As the days confined inside the ark continue endlessly, problems arise between animals. Things can and do get “worse and worse.” Finally, a leak demands drastic action. This cute story points out that if you are working together on a project, you forget your problems, and then think of new ways to work together on other things. The plot adheres to the biblical chronology. The tale flows smoothly via active verbs, passages of alliterative prose and a vocabulary sprinkled with Yiddish expressions. The distasteful events are realistic; the reader bonds with Noah’s family who must solve these ills. They are presented with warm humor that allows the reader to connect with the situation without discounting the problems or turning away. The illustrations are uneven. The earth toned palette is lovely; the humans come across but the animals are not consistent. Sometimes they look like animals and sometimes like people in animal costumes.
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

While a humorous spin on daily life on Noah’s ark promotes cooperation and empathy, there are many “Noah books” out there, especially in this genre of “Bad Days on the Ark.” Despite the fun, the volume is a discretionary purchase.

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

BIOGRAPHY


This basic thirty-two-page biography opens with Irena Sendler’s early morning arrest by the Gestapo in 1943. It then goes back to describe her childhood in Poland and her family’s close relationships with their Jewish neighbors. It continues with a brief description of the Nazi invasion of Poland and a more detailed account of Irena’s efforts to distribute typhus vaccines and other needed supplies inside the Warsaw Ghetto. An entire chapter is dedicated to Sendler’s work to save Jewish children from deportation and death by sneaking them outside of the Ghetto and finding safe places for them to hide. After Sendler was arrested, she was brutally tortured but eventually released. She continued to save Jewish children and after the war ended, worked to reunite them with their families. Irena Sendler was honored by Yad Vashem in 1965 for saving more than 2,500 children. Text boxes provide helpful background information and photographs, “Did You Know?” facts, and definitions of terms are also included on each page; a glossary, index and “Critical Thinking Questions” are appended. While other similar biographies are available, this is a nice resource that complements the two picture book biographies, Irena’s Jars of Secrets by Marcia Vaughan, illustrated by Ron Mazellan (Lee and Low Books, 2011), and Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto by Susan Goldman Rubin, illustrated by Bill Farnsworth (Holiday House, 2011), as well as the fictionalized account, The Safest Lie by Angela Cerrito (Holiday House, 2015).

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


This first biography of the writer behind the beloved Paddington Bear series describes Michael Bond’s childhood in England in the 1930’s, his experiences during World War II and how his family took in two refugee children, his difficulties in school, his service in the Royal Air Force, his career with the BBC, and the toy bear (a Christmas gift for his wife) that inspired him to write. After seven rejection letters, Bond finally sold his first story, A Bear Called Paddington, which was published in 1958. More than 150 books, a television show, a plush toy and other merchandise, and feature films followed, making the lovable, mischievous bear a household name around the world. Detailed, descriptive language and black and white photographs make this an accessible chapter book. Tolin also explains how the news reels that Michael Bond saw as a child and the Jewish children from the Kindertransport, wearing tags, that he witnessed flooding the Reading train station near his home, had a profound impact on Michael that stayed with him into adulthood. To the author, Paddington Bear was a symbol of those refugee children and his stories reflected their loneliness, confusion, and resilience. While the specific Jewish content is minimal, More than Marmalade would pair well with stories like Saving Hanno by Miriam Halahmy, The Children of Willesden Lane (Young Readers Edition) by Mona Golabek and Lee Cohen, and the “Kindertransport Trilogy” by Irene Watts (Good-bye Marianne, Remember Me, and Finding Sophie). A recommended purchase for school libraries, it will delight and inspire Paddington fans of all ages.

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

A small but vibrant group of Jews fled the Inquisition, settled in Recife, Brazil, and then, due to anti-Semitism, escaped yet again, arriving in New Amsterdam in the year 1654. Their story is told in the form of diary entries written by Asser Levy, one of the young men who landed in Manhattan with skills as a kosher butcher as well as high hopes and optimistic dreams. Weil tells the gripping story, beginning with their hazardous voyage during which Levy met his wife-to-be, and continuing with the group’s valiant attempts to successfully integrate into the social structure of their new land. They faced anti-Semitism once again in their new home, notably in the person of Peter Stuyvesant, New Amsterdam’s director-general. Nevertheless, the small community also found helpful allies and, in spite of many obstacles, rose to the challenge of establishing themselves with a clarity of purpose and a determination to succeed. In an epilogue, Weil continues recounting Levy’s personal history, informing the reader that he was the first Jew in New Amsterdam to receive the rights of travel and trade, the first Jew to achieve the title of “burgher” or citizen, and the first Jewish homeowner in America. The epilogue continues the history of the community up until the surrender by Stuyvesant of New Amsterdam to the British crown and its renaming to New York. The back matter includes a timeline, a glossary, a list of associated websites for continuing research, the sources of the documents displayed, and an extensive bibliography.

The diary format gives the account a sense of immediacy and suspense. The text is accompanied by numerous black and white pictures culled from historical sources as well as reproductions of many original documents, seamlessly entwining verified history with this fictionalized account of Levy’s life. In the detailed “Author’s Note,” Weil acknowledges that much of the history she presents here is not fully verifiable but there is sufficient research to make the events recounted in this book plausible. She also connects the story of the Jews of Recife to the refugee crises of our day. The publisher has used a special typeface which is designed to minimize some of the common problems of dyslexia, making this book accessible to a wider audience, though some may find it off-putting.

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

**FICTION - MIDDLE GRADE**


Bais Naomi’s fourth graders struggle to prioritize when faced with conflicting values. Shoshi, a stellar dancer, has the chance to do what no fourth grader has done before: perform in the eighth graders’ dance program. But, while dancing comes easily to her, Shoshi struggles with schoolwork and her parents say that she cannot dance unless her grades improve. Meanwhile, Tova Green chafes at unwanted changes, from the departure of her favorite teacher, Morah Steiner, to the unwanted attention caused by her injury in a recent car accident. Will Tova’s anger and frustration stop her from dancing at Morah Steiner’s wedding? And can the whole Achdus Club crew find ways to support one another and give back to their community without taking on more than they can handle?

This slim, highly readable chapter book tackles a surprising number of issues with admirable depth. Holt efficiently recaps characters’ struggles from previous books, then gracefully integrates them into the ongoing plot. With protagonists’ reflections, Holt creates space for readers to question stereotypical Jewish values like the prioritization of academic success over other endeavors. The Achdus girls periodically disagree with their parents or mistrust their teachers, but family remains central and educators ultimately celebrate students’ talents and recognize their diverse learning needs. A handful of Hebrew terms are interspersed without translation, in keeping with the Orthodox school setting.

Rebecca Fox, Children’s Librarian II, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens


The premise of this novel is that humans have eyewitness memories of historical events embedded in their brains which can be drawn out and “lived through again,” with the use of electric stimulation to specific parts of the brain. During his synagogue religious school class, Tyler is informed that he has special DNA that allows his brain to hold onto the actual memories of his ancestors. With his mother’s approval, he agrees to participate in a procedure that will hopefully bring those memories out. At the lab, Tyler’s head is fitted with wires that signal parts of his brain to remember. He is asked to read a short history of first-century Jews to “put him in the mood,” then told to count backward. The next chapter begins the stories of Matti, Jason, and Safira who participate in the Jewish rebellion against the Romans starting in 63 C.E. and continuing through the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. While an interesting idea, the execution of this short novel leaves much to be desired. With significant editing, this could have been a short story published online or in a magazine. Unfortunately, it appears to be the first in a series of novellas about the memories in Tyler’s brain.

Cutesy chapter titles (e.g. “We Mobilize to Attack – With Sheep Poop”), use of such pejoratives as “Gimp” to refer to someone who has a physical disability, and the multitude of typos and grammatical errors, detract significantly from the content. Then the story fixates on crucifixion (i.e. many graphic descriptions), refers several times to the teachings of a rabbi from Nazareth (i.e. Jesus), and uses of the term Judean to refer to the Jews which may be “historically accurate,” but confusing to young readers. Three pages of notes describe the many resources and the many reasons for much of what was written. The book has too many shortcomings, and the story is not engaging or interesting enough to keep any reader’s attention. Despite the glowing blurbs from Rabbi Elliot Dorff and Dr. Rachel Lerner, who deserve great respect, all libraries can pass on this one.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL President; Blogger at forwordsbooks.com, Seal Beach, CA


Mister Lister is the nickname of Reuven, a young boy in 3rd grade who loves making lists, always knows how many cars are in the carpool line, and is excellent at chess, but is also habitually spilling his water, dropping his sandwich, and bumping into his friends. Reuven also doesn’t enjoy changes, and in this follow up to Mister Lister (Targum, 2017), he is told by his parents that he has to spend two days a week in aftercare at the school library. Reuven is nervous about the change in routine, but very quickly he befriends the librarian, Mr. Bookman, whose name might be a little too on the nose, and learns the Dewey Decimal System, becoming one of those kids who absolutely loves shelving books. Since Reuven sees it as a giant list, which he thoroughly enjoys, and Mr. Bookman’s knee is acting up, he takes to shelving and finding the books rather quickly, endearing him to the eighth graders who are doing a research project. Because of this, Ezra, one of the eighth graders, decides to start a Big Brother program and Mister Lister is chosen as his little brother. Reuven is worried that Ezra only chose him because he pities him and not because he actually wants to be his friend. As the school year goes on and Reuven spends more time with Ezra and Mr. Bookman, he learns some valuable tools to help improve his social skills and his time at school, including problem solving.

This early chapter book is clearly written with an Orthodox audience in mind although many kids will probably see themselves in some of the anxiousness and awkwardness that Mister Lister brings to the story, as well as some of his passion and enjoyment for the things he loves. Though it’s never explicitly stated, one might assume that Reuven is on the autism spectrum and the book may have benefitted from a note about this at the end. Mister Lister Strikes Again is obviously recommended for all Orthodox
schools and synagogues, but it would be a great purchase for other organizations as well who are serving elementary and middle schoolers, so that they can see a window into an Orthodox school.

Rebecca Levitan. Librarian II, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch


The Chinese and Jewish Horowitz family from Sydney Taylor Honor Book *This is Just a Test* (Scholastic, 2017) is back. And this time Lauren is the star. She and her best friend Tara (“the Royal We”) get parts in the school play. But while Lauren gets a place in the ensemble, Tara is the star, the blond All-American Girl. Lauren does her best, but the girls’ relationship is strained. As she finds her way back to her energetic and creative self, Lauren discovers Patsy Cline and her haunting music, the story of a Chinese-American man who was killed, and some new information about her grandmother Wai Po. In the end Lauren’s world has found a slightly different, but altogether appropriate axis. The show is a rousing success with a surprise ending. And “the Royal We” find new friends.

The book is set in the mid-1980s, but the issues and problems are timeless. While Judaism is not a dominant theme, it is never out of sight. There is a Shabbat at home and a Passover Seder to reinforce the family’s connection. There are funny scenes galore including kids, parents and the two grandmothers, as well as tender moments as Lauren finds her way. The chapter titles and illustrations (many of them Lauren’s home-made buttons) add more color to the life in the text. In addition, the book asserts the value of families who don’t “look Jewish.” Lauren and her family will steal the reader’s heart.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


It is the spring of 1953. Marty Rafner is about to turn 13. He is a Yankees fan (especially young Mickey Mantle) and listens to every game he can. But life soon presents an adult-level set of problems. One friend’s father is fired by the local college and decides to go underground. Another friend turns against Marty because his parents are “pinkos.” The coach kicks Marty off the baseball team, and a neighbor returns from the war in Korea broken in body and mind. More importantly, Marty’s own family is falling apart. His parents are under pressure to sign the college’s loyalty oath. His mother is called before a congressional committee. There are FBI agents on the street, watching their home. And everyone is waiting for the imminent execution of the Rosenbergs on charges of espionage. The story is heavily focused on Marty’s turmoil, as he navigates the treacherous territory of life. Though he cannot avoid the real-world problems he faces, he deals with them admirably. In the end he becomes an unlikely hero, but his personal dilemmas remain to be resolved.

Lois Ruby’s new novel is filled with powerful vignettes involving both Marty and the adults around him. His life and his impulses to do the right thing are dramatically presented. There is Jewish content in the story, but it is not a primary element.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


Eight Jewish stories are woven together in a daring adventure tale. When Rose is helping her mother make challah, her Bubbe suddenly appears in a cloud of flour. Bubbe frantically chokes out that Rose and her twin brother Ben must find a package containing a secret book that can save her and their grandfather from an unknown threat. As the twins search for their missing grandparents, aided only by the mysterious book, a lantern, a bird, and their wits, they are pursued by a “creepy sorceress” who
wants the book. The stories they uncover in the book — about the flying Ziz, a golem made of dough, the giant Og, the gatekeeper at a maze, a treasure-seeker who lives in a mushroom hut, the riddle of a maze — provide clues to help them defeat the sorceress. As the mystery deepens, the siblings move back and forth between being in the stories and reading the stories and they encounter objects, people, and scenes from the stories. They learn that they must “follow the Lamplighter’s wise advice, slip past a guard into the maze, find and reunite with their grandparents, and learn why they have inherited the responsibility to protect the book — and the Jewish people.” At the end, they learn Grandpa’s story and understand how he inherited the secret book that he passes on to them to treasure and protect as he did. The stories almost vanished, but Rose and Ben understood their responsibility to inherit and pass down the stories to future generations, for the stories were now inside them.

With artful, easily understood frames and vivid colors, the author/illustrator crafts an engaging read. The stories are taken from the Mishnah, Hasidic tales, Midrash, tales of the Ba’al Shem Tov, and a story by Kafka. A few of the stories seem unrelated to the main story and would benefit from being placed between reminders of the main story line, rather than following directly after each other, but the reader can understand, even without this assistance.

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


Essie Rose is about to turn eleven when her beloved nanny and housekeeper Pearlie May Gibbs leaves town to take care of her sister. Pearlie May charges Essie Rose to “get on with her business” while she’s gone, leaving Essie Rose to figure out what that means. Written in diary entries, Essie Rose records the events of the anxious summer of 1953 Tipton, Mississippi. Her family is the only Jewish family in town, and her father’s general store “on the wrong side of the tracks” is repeatedly vandalized. The mean girls in her class regularly bully her and though she tries to follow Pearlie May’s “half dozen words of wisdom,” she has a difficult time confronting them. Additionally, while Pearlie May is at her sister’s there’s an essay contest about a Hero in Tipton. Essie Rose writes about Pearlie May even though her new friend Moses Brownbridge tells her they won’t pick an essay about a Black person. Determined that the judges will recognize a hero no matter the color of their skin, Essie Rose submits the essay anyway. When Pearlie May doesn’t come home, and Daddy’s store has been vandalized too many times, the Ginsburgs decide it’s time to return to the North. Before they do though, can Essie Rose “get on with her business and make Pearlie May proud?”

While stories of Jewish people in the South are somewhat few and far between, *Essie Rose’s Revelation Summer* relies too heavily on capitalization — to the point that it distracts from the story. Additionally, Essie Rose seems *extremely* naive for an eleven-year-old in 1953 Mississippi. Finally, though we never actually see the character of Pearlie May Gibbs, she is essentially the “Magical Negro” trope. Pearlie May exists in the story solely to support Essie Rose, all the way down to her “Half-Dozen Words of Wisdom” that Essie Rose keeps referencing. Moses Brownbridge is a much more developed character, he and Essie Rose reading together, and sharing Shabbat dinner.

Rebecca Levitan, Librarian II, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

FICTION - TEEN READERS


Germany 1945. Sixteen-year-old Katja and her older sister, Hilde, live on a farm with Mutti, their mother. Their father was killed during the war, the Soviet army is taking over the country, and the three women are forced to leave their home. On their journey to a faraway town where they hope to find shelter with a distant friend, Mutti is killed by a Soviet soldier. The two sisters make their way to Fahloff (a fictional town), where Ilse and Otto give them reluctant shelter. Told from Katja’s point of view, this historical novel unfolds in ever-widening ripples of suspense as Katja makes one impulsive move after another, some with dire consequences. As the plot thickens, she moves from naivete to knowledge about what happened to Jews in Germany. She grapples with her guilt: particular guilt at not being able to save her Jewish piano teacher and his family; general guilt about how most Germans were silent bystanders, turning away while Jews and other people were sent on transports to the death camps.

This novel is replete with themes for the reader to ponder: luck, friendship, guilt, honesty, survival, revenge, heroism. Barker uses figurative language like similes and metaphors, sensory details, and even humor to give some relief to the bleakness of this story. Interwoven through all the events is the power of music. Katja plays the piano to forget, to comfort others, to hope. In the end, there is a resolution of sorts. All is not well with the world, but there is hope for Katja and Hilde. Because of the peripheral connection to the Holocaust, this novel at first seems like an apologist telling. However, in her author’s note, Barker states, “This novel should not be read as a justification for a particular response to the Holocaust.” She goes on to explain that, given Katja’s circumstances, it was unlikely she would have known the truth about the camps and the Final Solution. This powerful book will not leave you unmoved.

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


Gravity “Doomsday” Delgado considers herself half Dominican (father) and half Jewish (mother), although Judaism is the only religion she practices. Her passion to be a champion boxer leads her to a gym in Brooklyn, earns her a Junior Golden Gloves title, takes her through all of the international bouts required to become a member of the United States Olympic Boxing Team, and ultimately lands her at the Olympics in Rio as part of Team USA. Along the way, Gravity must deal with life situations that are difficult to read about and, it feels, impossible to live through. Her mother is a hateful, physically and emotionally abusive alcoholic who pawns Gravity’s trophies for money to buy alcohol and steals any money that comes Gravity’s way. As big sister to Tyler, she does everything she can to keep him safe and healthy. Eventually, Gravity and Tyler use her Olympics’ money to rent a small apartment and live on their own. Despite this brutal upbringing, there are many people in Gravity’s corner – her Aunt Rosa, her cousins, her coach, and all the boxers — women and men — who come to admire her throughout her journey. Gravity makes mistakes, many of them, but ultimately this is a story about having the courage to pursue your dreams no matter what life throws at you.

The book is an entertaining and engaging read, filled with boxing terminology and sports analogies. The Jewish content is doled out in small bits throughout the story. Gravity’s Jewish mother has a myriad of negative traits, but she does make a delicious challah. She also teaches Gravity Hebrew prayers, telling her “…the Shema is the best one, because most prayers were for special days, but the Shema was for every moment of your life…” Gravity talks to God and prays often, finding solace in Psalm 144, but when she says the Shema in the boxing ring before a bout, she kneels down to pray, something Jews
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

do not do. In an interview with Deming (https://www.heyalma.com), the author explains that this is what Claressa Shields, an Olympic gold medalist and world champion boxer, a devout Christian and the inspiration for this story, does in the ring. Deming, who was also a boxer and is now a boxing coach, drew on her own life experience to add further dimension to the characters and the story. Recommended for Jewish libraries looking for some diversity in their YA collection.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL President; Blogger at forwordsbooks.com, Seal Beach, CA


As Nevaeh Levitz enters her sophomore year, her Black mother, Corinne, has left her white, Jewish father and they have moved from an affluent suburb to Corinne’s family’s Harlem brownstone with Nevaeh’s Baptist pastor grandfather, aunt, uncle and cousins. Corrine is severely depressed, and not able to be there for her daughter. Formerly able to “pass” with her light skin, Nevaeh becomes acutely aware of macro- and micro-aggressions. She meets Jesus, and she is smitten. Then, Nevaeh’s father suddenly decides that her Jewish heritage is important and that instead of a Sweet Sixteen, she will be having a belated bat mitzvah. Enter Rabbi Sarah, who teaches Nevaeh her Torah portion and other aspects of Judaism. As the year progresses, Nevaeh starts to gain more confidence in herself, but missteps at a BLM fundraiser, reading more of her poems and taking away time from the featured speaker, missing her best friend’s dance tryout in the process. Her father cancels the lavish bat mitzvah that had been planned, but after her learning and preparation, Nevaeh wants to proceed. Tensions with her father and friends escalate, the bat mitzvah is held at her grandfather’s Baptist church, and she asks for forgiveness publicly and reconciles with family and friends.

Inspired by Díaz’s experience, the YA elements of this novel are presented well: fitting in – amplified because of Nevaeh’s mixed heritage, peer pressure, first love, fashion, and current slang. The Jewish content, however, is not. Negative character tropes include Nevaeh’s loud aggressive lawyer father, her overbearing, nagging, and meddling Bubby, and nerdy Mordechai, a little boy who dresses “like an AARP spokesperson.” Rabbi Sarah, who is a positive influence on Nevaeh, is a mess, with hair “covered with an oily sheen that somehow maintains a springy, spiderwebbed disarray,” a sock-strewn apartment and a sketchy past. Much of the Jewish practice is incorrect, with the Four Questions of the Passover Seder in the wrong order, the blessings over the Hanukkah candles said in reverse order, the wrong blessing with a wrong translation said over food, and an aliya that, even allowing for creative alternative practice, is way off. While this may be an important book in terms of own voices and biracial identity, the depiction of Jewish characters and ritual are problematic and detract from the book’s impact.

Chava Pinchuck, past chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

[Editors’ Note: Color Me In was a finalist in the Young Adult Literature Category of the 2019 National Jewish Book Award.]


Halle Levitt, now a recognized influencer, created her blog and media ID hoping not only to promote YA literature, but to strengthen her self-identity separately from her famous documentary filmmaker parents and her famous teen novel editor grandmother, recently deceased. Halle is “Kels” at her OneTruePastry address; the pastry is homemade cupcakes, a skill honed with her grandmother. When her parents go to Israel to film, they leave Halle and younger brother Ollie with Gramps. The children have supervision and their Grandfather has company to assuage his grief. At her new school Halle meets, in person, Nash, a social media best friend, finds he is even better IRL, and starts a relationship with him without admitting...
she is Kels whom she knows he really, really likes. As the dilemma moves from awkward to dramatic, Jewish practice is comfortably introduced because Gramps is more observant than the mainstream youngsters. He takes them to Shabbat services at synagogue, to holidays at friends, and to the Jewish cemetery for Grams’ stone unveiling. As readers wonder how Halle will explain Kels to Nash and what will happen when she does, they examine friendship in person rather than hiding behind the internet. The book raises questions of who is the real you and why you may be afraid of who you think you are. Halle avoids the truth because she cannot find the right words the way Kels does. Gramps is savvy and kind; through his grief he learns the value of therapy and suggests the same to his granddaughter. The satisfying ending fits emotionally and all the characters mature as a result of their experiences.

This “love triangle” with two people propels an engaging teen romcom. Likeable characters sharing adolescent fears and dreams drive a well-considered plot that mixes first person narrative with twitter feed. The novel moves chronologically through the protagonist’s senior year in high school, noting as many Jewish calendar events as secular ones.

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


As a young woman, a very pregnant Emily and her husband Ray travel to Australia to visit her terminally ill grandmother. While there, soaking up her grandmother’s presence, Emily flashes back to her previous visit. When she was fourteen, Emily had an additional time at her grandparents’ home. She had somehow been whisked back in time to when Emily’s mother was fourteen and living in the house. She spent several days in that time learning about her mother’s childhood, meeting the grandfather who had died before Emily was born, and meeting an Aboriginal man who spoke about his people’s way of life. She continues to travel back in time and place – next to her grandmother’s childhood life in South Africa where the family had fled the Holocaust. She learns how Jews lived there in the time of Apartheid. Again, after a few days she disappears from the grandmother’s childhood and reappears in her great grandmother’s home in Soviet ruled Lithuania. Emily is engulfed in a large loving Orthodox family who are desperately trying to find a way out and away from the pogroms. And lastly, Emily lands in Babylonia just as King Cyrus has given permission for Jews to return to Jerusalem.

In each time and place, Emily learns about her family, how they expressed their Judaism, and the people who lived around them. As the present-day Emily says goodbye to her beloved grandmother, she gets glimpses of her own daughter to be. Highly recommended.

Sheryl Stahl, Director, Frances-Henry Library, HUC-JIR, Los Angeles, CA


Jenna Cohen has been living with cerebral palsy for sixteen years, putting up with a constant stream of new treatments and therapies and mobility aids that are supposed to make her life better, but often just make it more uncomfortable and/or inconvenient. When she discovers that her condition was caused by medical malfeasance, she begins to doubt whether all the effort she makes - physically, academically - is worthwhile, and whether her parents should be the ones making decisions about her future care. As Jenna embarks on a journey towards medical emancipation, an old friend, Julian, moves back to town and she establishes a relationship with him on secretive terms. Jenna’s attempts to assert her independence have mixed results for her health and her relationship with her parents.

The Jewishness in this book is subtle, but sweet and accurate. Jenna gets her lawyer uncle on retainer with a payment of eighteen dollars and is captivated by the idea of the thirty-six “saints” who keep the world
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from being destroyed. It’s not an integral part of the plot or her characterization, but this kind of low-key representation, especially in “intersectional” spaces, is valuable and enjoyable. Julian is your typical jock-with-a-heart to Jenna’s academically-inclined-introvert, but their closeness feels genuine even before he realizes who his mysterious text-only friend really is. Of all the relationships in this book, the most satisfying is that of Jenna with her own siblings, who are truly supportive and loving in a very teenage way.

Aviva Rosenberg, Children’s Librarian, Ridgefield Public Library, Ridgefield, NJ

HOLOCAUST AND WORLD WAR II


This story starts in 1942 at The Children’s Home in Sèvres, France. Rachel Cohen is living there with other children, and she learns how to take pictures and develop film. When the Germans begin closing in on France, Rachel becomes Catherine and is sent to a convent to keep her safe. Throughout the rest of the war, Catherine continues to take pictures and continues to move for her safety. She becomes a teacher as well, and when she cannot find her parents following the liberation of France, she returns to The Children’s Home in Sèvres to teach until she realizes her heart is in being a photographer and leaves to photograph the world.

Based on her mother’s life, Billet’s tale of Catherine is a compelling story enhanced by Fauvel’s illustrations. Many images are framed as photographs, or as Catherine looks through the viewfinder of her camera. The translation by Ivanka Hahnenberger is clear and concise. Back matter includes a map of Catherine’s journey around France, actual photographs from the Sèvres Children’s home, a note from the author, and questions from readers.

Rebecca Levitan. Librarian II, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch


Using letters between pen pals, Andrew Fukuda’s This Light Between Us: A Novel of World War II juxtaposes two wartime injustices: the Holocaust and the internment of Japanese Americans. Charlie Lévy is a bubbly Parisian schoolgirl and Alex Maki a shy boy living off the coast of Washington state. Through their letters the two describe the surrender of their societies to bigotry in the 1940s. Following Pearl Harbor, Alex is snubbed at school and abused by his homeroom teacher. In occupied Paris, Charlie describes her own humiliation, “We can’t use public street phones, can’t enter parks or theaters or swimming pools or music halls or cafés, can’t borrow books from libraries.” Soon Alex’s family is transferred to the Manzanar internment camp, Charlie’s parents are deported, and Charlie herself is betrayed. At the core of The Light Between Us are Alex’s conflicting loyalties; should he join the camp’s resistance or expedite his father’s release from prison by enlisting in the army? Defying his older brother, Alex joins up, entering the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, an all-Japanese unit which would become the most decorated in American military history. In 1945 they liberate a subcamp of Dachau. To maintain the focus on Alex’s quest to find Charlie alive, Fukuda relies on magic realism: a tingling sensation in his spine signals her “presence” at Dachau, a gimmick that mars an otherwise gripping historical novel. Alas, when he goes to Paris, he learns that Charlie has not survived the war. After the war, Alex fulfills his ambition of being an illustrator, and always remembers Charlie with fondness.

Setting the Holocaust and the Japanese internment against each other is risky; these events differ not only in scale (6,000,000 murdered as against 118,000 interned) but in meaning. To his credit, Fukuda
Defying the Nazis: The Life of German Officer Wilm Hosenfeld, Young Readers Edition

By Hermann Vinke
Translated by H. B. Babiar

Shortlisted for the 2019 Global Literature in Libraries Initiative (GLLLI) Translated YA Book Prize

After witnessing Nazi violence against Poles and Jews, German officer Wilm Hosenfeld, initially an admirer of Hitler, became a rescuer. He saved Polish pianist Władysław Szpilman and more than 60 other people during the Holocaust. For his efforts, Hosenfeld was named by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among the Nations.

Defying the Nazis is a story of courageous transformation revealed through Wilm Hosenfeld’s own letters and journal entries.

Hardcover: 978-1-59572-759-6 • $19.99
224 pp. • Grades 8-12

"Understanding Hosenfeld’s life may inspire present-day readers to act on conviction, maintain humane values, and act sympathetically toward the oppressed."
—Jewish Book Council

“. . . it is imperative for young readers to understand that not every Nazi killed, making this an important addition to a Holocaust library.” —AJL News & Reviews

"Vinke’s book has supplied a valuable addition to existing histories of the Holocaust and resistance to the Nazi regime . . . “ —Wiener Holocaust Library blog (UK)

“A fine addition to biography, Holocaust, and World War II collections that serve teens.” —School Library Journal

“Solid writing and photographs throughout bring the story of this complex individual to life . . . this work is a fitting tribute.” —Kirkus Reviews

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suggests no equivalence between them. His intention is simply to highlight where indifference to racism leads. The author’s note clarifies the line between fact and fiction in his imaginative retelling of historical events. The bibliography directs the reader to excellent sources, especially the testimonies of Japanese Americans in the Densho digital collection.

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


This novel set during World War II is based on the real life of Ludviga (Nina) Pukas, a Catholic woman who could not read or write when she became the housekeeper for Frima Sternik, a Jewish woman who lived in Proskurov, Ukraine with her daughters. Twelve-year-old Dina, six-year-old Nadia, and baby Galya live with their mother in Proskurov. Their father has died, and Mama must go back to work. Enter Nina, the new housekeeper, who will look out for the children and the home while Mama is away. The Nazis take over the town, and the trouble begins. No school for the children. No job for Mama. Nina must go out and do the shopping as Jews are not allowed on the streets. When their house burns down, they are left with nothing but the clothes on their backs. The family seeks help from an uncle living in a different part of the town, who provides a safe night of rest, new clothes, and food, much to the consternation of his non-Jewish wife. They must obtain new papers to find a place to live, but they have no identification, nor Jewish stars on their clothes. Nina decides to register everyone as her Catholic family with Mama as her housekeeper. Dina has taught Nina how to read and write and she pulls it off. All is well until Mama is recognized in the marketplace and finds herself locked in the town ghetto and ultimately transported to a death camp. Unwavering, Nina continues to protect the children throughout the war, accepting that their mother has been murdered. When their uncle comes to get them, as he feels is his duty, the sisters decide to stay with Nina, now Mama to all of them.

The back matter in the book includes an “Author’s Note” and a short biography of Nina Pukas who was named Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in 1994. With language readable enough for Middle Grade students, and a tense “girl wearing a star of David necklace” scene reminiscent of Number the Stars by Lois Lowry (HMH Books, 1989), this is a book that belongs on any library shelf.

Kathy Bloomfield, AJL President; Blogger at forwordsbooks.com, Seal Beach, CA


Sarah Goldstein, blond, blue eyed, small for her sixteen years, and trained in acting and languages, remakes herself as non-Jewish Ursula, a “Shirley Temple” figure, blending in at high society cocktail parties, listening in on Nazi secrets for “the Captain,” the British spy for whom she works. Clementine, a biracial woman of German-Senegalese descent, joins the Captain and Sarah on their dangerous spy mission to Africa. They must locate a German doctor who is rumored to be spreading a highly contagious disease that causes death by bleeding. He is conducting hazardous and inhumane experiments on the inhabitants of small African villages. The Germans want the disease for germ warfare. Pretending to be missionaries, Sarah and the Captain meet medical missionaries already there to treat the disease, the doctor, and his glamorous daughter who takes Sarah into her affections. A daring rescue mission aboard a German U-boat ultimately forces Sarah to confront her inner demons and the deadly actions she must take to save innocent people.

This book is a sequel to Orphan Monster Spy (Viking Books for Young Readers, 2018; reviewed in the February/March 2019 issue of AJL Reviews), and while it isn’t imperative to read that first, it will help the reader. Frequent flashbacks, dreams, self-reflection, and characters from the first book attempt to
flesh out Sarah’s back story and emotional development, but more often confuse the reader. German words, many of them swear words or other inappropriate phrases, are frequently inserted in the text without translation. Clementine’s character is important to the plot but not well developed or explained. She comes across as a negative stereotype of a Black person. Despite these issues, this is an engaging read, full of many surprising plot twists that incorporates history likely unfamiliar to most readers. A detailed author’s endnote explains that the story is inspired by the Nama and Herero genocides and the war crimes of Japan’s unit 731. The notes do an excellent job of explaining real historical events and persons and the fictional parts of the book.

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


While young readers may already be familiar with the iconic story of Anne Frank and her diary, they may not know much about the woman who saved the diary and cared for the Frank family in hiding -- Miep Gies, who escaped World War I Vienna on a Kindertransport to the Netherlands. A foster family with other children took her in and they moved to Amsterdam. Miep eventually became an employee of Otto Frank and grew close to his family. As the days of Nazi occupation and war closed in on the Dutch people, and Dutch Jews in particular, Miep helped the Franks find their hiding place behind the bookcase in Frank’s place of business.

Lowell’s straightforward prose and Valentina Toro’s illustrations highlight the difficulties Miep and the Frank family faced. Lowell’s useful author’s note anticipates reader questions such as whether Miep ever saw her family again (she did). The illustration sometimes complements the text with greater nuance, often using a muted palette vis-à-vis the red of the Nazi flags. This book about Miep Gies joins those about Irena Sendler and Janusz Korczak in helping youngsters understand the acts of rescuers and their difficult decisions.

Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Somerset, NJ

ISRAEL


In a whirlwind tour of scenes from the United States and Israel, Bari introduces preschoolers to the English and Hebrew names for several animals and to the sounds we say those animals make in each language. “What does a dog say?” A shaggy golden dog waves an American flag in front of the U.S. Capitol and says, “Bow, wow, wow!” A pointy-eared kelev waves an Israeli flag in front of the Knesset and says, “Hav, hav, hav!” Hebrew terms appear in transliteration only, with a pronunciation guide at the book’s end, implying a target audience of native English speakers with a limited knowledge of Hebrew.

Young preschoolers will enjoy learning animal names and sounds in multiple languages, and the reminder that, “A cow and parah both say, ‘Moo!’ in English…and in Hebrew too!” adds a nice note of cross-cultural unity. The cheery background images highlight an arbitrary selection of emblematic sites in the United States and in Israel. While some sites are readily identifiable and may serve as conversation starters, caregivers may struggle to recognize others and a key is not included.

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

Tammar Stein’s *Six-Day Hero* (Kar-Ben, 2017) introduced readers to one Israeli family’s tragic experience of the Six-Day War. With *Beni’s War*, she continues their story. The Laor family has just moved to a moshav in the Golan where their youngest son Beni has a hard time fitting in. When he stands up for Sara, a girl whose appearance marks her out as “different,” he’s bullied by Yoni and Ori. It takes Beni’s older brother Motti, on leave from the army, to put the bullies in their place; it will take the common experience of the Yom Kippur War to bind the teens together as friends. Sitting only five kilometers from the Syrian border, the moshav is set to evacuate when Syrian shells rain down. The residents huddle in shelters, emerging to “a festival of bonfires. All the work, the hours in the hot sun, the new crops ready for harvest—for nothing.” Without reading like propaganda, *Beni’s War* sheds light on the strengths and vulnerabilities of Israeli life. Kibbutz Lavi welcomes the evacuees with clean diapers and baby formula. Watching a troop convoy, Beni muses, “Every single person in those vehicles is facing danger to protect us. I wish I could do something,” then gets busy making sandwiches for the troops with Sara. When a truce is signed, Beni’s family faces a second ordeal: Motti’s capture by the Egyptians. It strains credulity when twelve-year-old Beni just happens to be in the right place at the right time to help repair the bus shuttling the Egyptian POWs to the border (thus ensuring the return of his brother). One also wonders whether Beni’s empathy for the Egyptian POWs reflects contemporary Israeli sentiments or is aimed at an American readership: “One by one, the Egyptians walk by me. They don’t look angry or hateful… The next man who passes me smiles and nods in silent greeting. I smile and nod back.”

Still, *Beni’s War* depicts neither an idealized Israel nor a flawed country which needs to be apologized for. Instead, it faithfully paints life as lived in a country where war is never far away.

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

**LIFECYCLE AND JEWISH VALUES**


Based on chapter 5, verse 20 in *Pirkei Avos*, the Stein family discovers lessons from four zoo animals which they can apply to their own lives. Told in lively rhymes with simple, colorful illustrations, the reader learns basic facts about the animals’ lives and habits, eventually focusing on one special trait for each animal. A leopard is bold, an eagle acts gently, a deer is swift, and a lion is strong. All that we are taught by the animals is meant to help us do the will of God and be good people.

The quote from *Pirkei Avos* is in Hebrew and translated into English, but terms such as *brachah*, *tefillah*, *middos* and other Hebrew words used are not translated or explained. The bright fun illustrations, substantial content, and creative presentation provide a fun experience for children along with their parents. The interaction between parents and children is positive and warm. Although the illustrations and lifestyle described portray an Orthodox family, with some explanation this book can be enjoyed by all. The lessons are universal and the story is engaging.

*Rachel K. Glasser, retired librarian, Teaneck, NJ*


What is *zrizus*? It means to hurry, and that’s how this lively family does their mitzvos or good deeds—with smiles and enthusiasm and alacrity. There are four children who carry bags of groceries for their Bubby, return a lost kippa found in the park, care for a little girl who got hurt playing catch, befriend a new child in town, and take care of their baby sister.
The positive ideas will resonate with all children and parents, but the book is definitely geared to an Orthodox audience through dress, certain ideas and impressions, and the home setting. The Hebrew terms are transliterated and defined in a small glossary found in the back of the book. The illustrations are quite colorful though simplistic, and the laminated pages will be perfect for young sticky hands.

Rachel K. Glasser, retired librarian, Teaneck, NJ


Veteran preschool teacher Orelowitz uses rhyming couplets to set a scene for each letter and introduces a memorable Hebrew word that begins with the letter. Each Hebrew word is transliterated to assist parents/caregivers who are new to Hebrew: “Zoom Mr. Zayin, just as fast as you can! [zerizus/quickness]; Challah smells so good from Mrs. Ches’s pan. [challah]. Each letter is anthropomorphized with captivating facial expressions and gestures that help to make it memorable. Each letter is four inches tall — perfect for tracing with little fingers, and the oversize board book format (8.5” x 8.5”) is comfortable and durable for little hands. Each Hebrew word is transliterated to assist parents/caregivers who are new to Hebrew. Ashkenazic pronunciation is used throughout: “train” is transliterated as rakeves not rakevet, and Shabbat is written as Shabbos. Most of the examples for the letters illustrate Jewish practice from an observant perspective. Additionally, some may be concerned that only five of the letters are characterized as female while seventeen are male. A charming way to learn the aleph beis!

Rena Citrin, Library Director, Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School, Chicago


A boy enjoys a bowl of ice cream and thanks his Bubby for getting his favorite flavor. “Don’t thank me,” she says. “Thank Zaidy for buying it.” The boy goes to thank Zaidy, and thus begins the chain of food production and delivery that culminated with his bowl of ice cream. The boy and his Zaidy go to the local store to thank the grocer; he tells them to thank the people at the ice cream factory. Bubby joins them for a drive out to the factory, and they are told to thank the farmer for sending the milk from his farm. After a short drive to the farm, Berel the farmer tells the boy to thank the cows that produce the milk. The boy walks to the cow barn and thanks all the cows for the milk. One cow picks up her head and looks toward the sky, and the boy thinks she is telling him to “thank the Creator above.” So he looks upward and yells, “Thank You for Everything!” On the drive home, the boy thanks his grandparents for an amazing day, and they answer, “You’re welcome.”

A hybrid between a cumulative story and a *pourquoi* tale, the book works well to teach the Jewish values of being thankful and expressing *hakaras hatov* (appreciating the good). It can also be used to teach about how food is produced and gets to our tables. Starr’s illustrations are colorful, but static and somewhat old-fashioned. The boy wears a cap, Bubby wears a straw hat, and Zaidy wears a kippah. (The other men wear various head coverings and there are no other women.) The author is a preschool teacher who has published several other books. Suitable for all libraries, *Don’t Thank Me* can also be used to complement a Shavuot unit, or young readers could continue the story and talk about cars and roads.

Chava Pinchuck, past chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


The name given to a child by his parents identifies and defines who he is. Names may be short or long, Hebrew or perhaps Yiddish in origin, given to honor a parent, grandparent, or other important family
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member, or of a great Jewish leader, Biblical personality, or scholar or even to emphasize a specific personality trait. Some will give their children multiple names to honor more than one special person. It is typical that at a circumcision (bris milah) for a boy or a naming ceremony for a baby girl that the baby’s parents will share how they came to choose the particular name and the relevance to their family history, along with their hopes and dreams for the newborn baby.

The laminated pages are filled with over 170 different names, some written in Hebrew script and others in English letters. The brief story is told in catchy rhymes and encourages pride in our Jewish names. While the artwork and approach are focused on the Orthodox community, this special message will resonate with all Jewish families. Knowledge and comfort with traditional customs and Jewish law will be helpful in understanding the process of naming a Jewish child.

Rachel K. Glasser, retired librarian, Teaneck, NJ

NONFICTION


How do people act in times of crisis? The book centers on the Rivkin family, the Lubavitch shlichim in New Orleans. It is told primarily through the eyes of eight-year-old Mushka. She and her family had just moved to the city and were living with their grandparents, long-time leaders of the Chasidic community. The story begins on Shabbat afternoon, August 27th, 2005. Each of the 14 chapters begins with a quick overview of the storm and its accompanying crisis, then follows the Rivkins as they prepare for, survive, help others with, and finally escape the aftermath of Katrina. While Mushka (the oldest of 5 siblings) does not take part in the adult world, the reader observes the situation clearly through her perspective; the text describes her own alarm at the situation, her intent to help in whatever ways she can, and the family’s dedicated work in the community after the disaster. The book describes their drive to Houston on August 30th, and the warm welcome they received there. The epilogue takes place at their reunion during Hanukkah, almost four months later.

Like the other books in this series, this is a story of survival, not tragedy. The text is appropriate for 4th graders, both vivid and inspirational. There are numerous photographs showing the storm and its aftermath, including several personal images from the Rivkin family, as well as a timeline and a glossary. It would have been interesting to hear directly from the family – especially Mushka, who is now about 22 – other than the letter at the very end.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

PICTURE BOOKS


On Musa’s first day of kindergarten, his teacher, Ms. Gupta, promises the students that they will become close friends over the course of the school year. “A great way to make new friends is by sharing things we like,” she tells Musa’s class, so, “This year for show-and-tell, you will take turns telling us all about your favorite day of the year.” Musa’s favorite day is Eid al-Fitr, a Muslim observance to mark the end of Ramadan, and he is certain that everyone in the class must feel the same. But Musa quickly learns that everyone celebrates different holidays. Over the course of the school year, Mo, whose yarmulke reads “Moshe,” introduces the class to Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year; Moisés introduces Las Posadas, a Latin American celebration of the nine days before Christmas; and Kevin, whose family celebrates science, introduces Pi Day (March 14th). Each child shares a few key phrases, foods, and practices associated with their holiday, and a refrain of “Everyone could see why [that holiday] was his favorite” reinforces a message of unity and respect.
The strength of the book lies in the joyous illustrations, a combination of digital brushwork and hand-printed textures, with visual details that bring each celebration to life and expand the representations of diversity. It is the illustrations that define culturally specific foods and décor. Likewise, the illustrations show that Mo celebrates Rosh Hashanah with two fathers, that Kevin’s parents are from different races, and that Musa signs his name in his home language. While every family observes differently, readers may be surprised that Mo’s family marks Rosh Hashanah with a braided, rather than round, challah, that all the men are wearing yarmulkes to such a diverse school, and that a kindergarten boy would choose Rosh Hashanah over Hanukkah or Purim as a favorite holiday. While the details of traditional observance are at times vague, the sense of camaraderie in a shared celebration of our differences is clear and compelling.

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


Bubbe and Zaide are very proud of their grandchildren, extolling all their positive attributes such as Klutzy Boy’s helpfulness, Shmutzy Girl’s enthusiasm and Noshy Boy’s appreciation. When Klutzy Boy breaks a window, Shmutzy Girl gets covered in paint and glue doing an art project, and Shluffy Girl falls asleep on the living room floor, Bubbe and Zaide excuse their faults. When one grandchild, Kvetchy Boy, questions the flaws of the others, his grandparents tell him, “If you love someone, you look for the good in them.” And that is the real lesson of this story.

The simple colorful illustrations enhance the story and add to the humor. A glossary explains the Yiddish in simple English terms. Lively and fun although a bit silly, it’s a valuable story for those families who still have Yiddish speakers in their families or for those who want to help keep the Yiddish language alive as part of our history. There are books about the individual kids, as well as a Hanukkah story available through the publisher (www.matzahballbooks.com).

Rachel K. Glasser, retired librarian, Teaneck, NJ


A refreshing take on traditional Bible stories, I Am the Tree of Life introduces young children to the practice of yoga by having them use their bodies to enact tales generally heard only in the classroom or seen between the covers of a book. The author, both a rabbi and a certified yoga instructor, teaches children to gently challenge their bodies using simple yoga poses which align with the stories: the boat pose when they learn about Noah’s Ark, the dancer pose when they learn about Miriam’s journey through the desert, the downward dog pose which is shaped like Abraham and Sarah’s tent, and a variety of others. The tree pose which strengthens balance and equilibrium is connected to the Torah, itself, with its “Tree of Life” imagery. The combination of Torah study and physical movement is a surprisingly satisfying concept, adding a new complex dimension to each. Proper breathing is emphasized as the author guides the reader into each pose with simple instructions. Preserving health is an important Jewish concept and, although yoga arises from a Hindu tradition, the author notes that Judaism has always interacted with other cultures, sharing ideas and concepts.

The illustrations feature two children learning the yoga postures alongside an associated picture of the pertinent Biblical scene. This innovative combination which combines the physical and the spiritual, can be used by teachers who wish to add an unusual and creative element to the teaching of basic Jewish sources.

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

“Long ago, in the days of King Herod, a man named Nicanor lived in the port city of Alexandria.” So begins a newly-illustrated edition of Nicanor’s Gate, originally published by JPS in 1979. Unlike the story of Jonah and the whale, which also pits its hero against a stormy sea, Nicanor’s Gate is not a complex moral tale. Instead, it is the simple story of a philanthropic merchant looking for a way to serve God. When Herod the Great (here a benevolent ruler rather than Josephus’ self-aggrandizing despot) rules Jerusalem, he decides to rebuild the Jewish Temple, sending a letter to Diaspora communities soliciting donations. As Kimmel tells it, “Nicanor’s heart leaped with joy as he read the letter. Now he knew why he had been blessed with riches.” Nicanor hires “the finest artisans in Alexandria” to craft the gates from “Corinthian gold, a rare mixture of copper, gold and silver that gleamed like the sun.” Two gates are fashioned and loaded onto a boat. Leaving Alexandria forever, Nicanor accompanies his doors on the sea voyage to the port of Caesarea in Israel. But on the way a storm whips up; one gate is blown overboard, and when the other is threatened as well, Nicanor (like Jonah) begs the seamen to throw him overboard -- with his gate. At that moment the sea calms (a response to Nicanor’s devotion?) and Nicanor and the second door arrive intact. Though Nicanor despairs over the loss of the first door, King Herod is more philosophical, “One door is better than no doors,” he says. “We do what we can. The rest is in God’s hands.”

Illustrator Alida Massari’s richly colored art deepens Kimmel’s story. Painted on laid watercolor paper, it is dominated by earth tones, ranging from the light tans of Middle Eastern alleys to deep maroons (Nicanor’s robe, the rooftops of an Egyptian city). The hues of the water reflect the transition from a calm sea (light blues and greens) to a stormy one (deep mauves). Perspective reflects plot; when the boat threatens to capsize, it tips forward towards the viewer, only to return to the perpendicular as the waters subside and the ship arrives safely in port. This new edition neglects to credit the Talmud as source for the tale, therefore allowing readers to think that the story is solely the author’s creation. An author’s note of explanation would have been helpful to readers.

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


Mónica is a young girl who has moved from Bolivia to a big U.S. city with a diverse community, where she starts “The Homesick Club” for students who miss their original homes. The only other member of the club is Hannah from Israel, but when a new teacher, Miss Shelby, arrives from Texas, Mónica suggests she might like to join them. As members of the club, Mónica, Hannah and eventually Miss Shelby, express to each other with beautifully evocative descriptions and illustrations what they miss most about Bolivia, Israel and Texas – the weather, the night sky, the animals, the food – and find connections and comfort through their shared longings. With accompanying detailed and joyful art, the story tackles the challenging emotions of immigration with an encouraging, upbeat message, relaying the value of cherishing one’s own culture, while understanding and appreciating the cultures of others.

Martha McMahon, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA


This modernized version of a classic Yiddish folktale will delight readers. Protagonist bookworm Stevie is the original’s “the man” while librarian Miss Understood is “the rabbi.” Stevie wants quiet in the library where he shelters because home is so loud. But each time he asks for silence, more people and
animals jump from the librarian’s special book. The crowd swells and then, as in the traditional story, reduces, leaving a happy Stevie, satisfied with the same surroundings he complained about at the start. It is all in your perception and appreciation of what you have, a moral identical to the original. This new, magical story arrives with a great vocabulary, colorful, active, identifying verbs, spot on adjectives, and photographic descriptions. Magic fills the pages as people, animals and things pop from Miss Understood’s book. Frenetic illustrations in primary colors sweep the action along. At the close, a detailed author’s note explaining the “Jewishness of the original folktale” is welcome and informative, bringing the shtetl message to a new generation draped in modern dress. Young readers will enjoy a well done updating of a delicious part of the Yiddish canon.

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


A young girl is frightened by a fierce storm raging outside her window. She asks her loving parents if they can stop the noise of the thunder, the flash of the lightning, the pounding of the heavy rain. Without downplaying her fears, they patiently respond that although they cannot eliminate the storm outside, there are many things she can do to make herself feel safe and secure inside her home. She can share the sweetness of sprinkled cookies with family; she can create a ruckus with a pot and spoon rivaling the thunder’s crash; her family can enjoy one another’s presence and feel cozy and warm together. The child, and by extension the reader or listener, learns that, although there are many things which cannot be controlled, she is by no means helpless. Scary things need not be overwhelming or cause anxiety. Instead, she has many resources at hand which can help her through frightening times.

Although the book is not overtly Jewish and has a universal outlook which can benefit any reader, there are subtle hints throughout that this is a Jewish family. Among other clues, the grandparents are referred to as Bubbe and Zayde, a tzadakah box can be seen on a table, and a mezuzah graces the front door. The illustrations evoke the gloomy darkness of a stormy day or the sunny brightness of a clear one while transmitting feelings of comfort and warmth. They perfectly echo the author’s message that when family is supportive, all is well. Here is a book written by a clinical psychologist, educator, and frequent lecturer which can be both helpful and effective in mitigating fears.

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


Farmer Earl and his large family have “no room to sit / no room to pace / no room to rest / no extra space.” He goes to see “the wise woman in town,” who advises him to put all the family’s ducks in the house, then all their horses, and so on. Though there’s no explicitly Jewish content, the humorous story of changing one’s perspective should be familiar to readers who’ve heard the Yiddish folktale credited on the copyright page, “It Could Always Be Worse.” The refrain above, and rhythmic lists of animal behaviors (“The ducks flapped / The ducks snacked / The ducks waddled / The ducks quacked”) up the story’s read-aloud potential, while the mottled illustrations, mostly in full-bleed spreads, give a sense of the house’s busy atmosphere. A Crowded Farmhouse Folktale can stand on its own for a Jewish or non-Jewish audience, or be paired with other adaptations of the Yiddish classic.

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

[Editors’ Note: Rachel Kamin suggests pairing with the classic It Could Always Be Worse by Margot Zemach and another new version, Such a Library! A Yiddish Folktale Re-Imagined by Jill Ross Nadler for a fun story time.]
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens


Many of us either have a name that is difficult to pronounce, or know someone who does. Thus, it is easy to empathize with the plight of poor Wakawakaloch, a young cave-girl. Everyone keeps messing up her name, calling her Walawala and Wammabammaslamma. Wakawakaloch wishes she had an easier name, one that she could find on a t-shirt like “Gloop” (sound familiar?). After a visit with the local elder, Wakawakaloch comes to appreciate her name because she was named for her great-great-great-great grandmother who performed brave and heroic deeds. She also figures out a way that she, and other kids with unusual names, can have their names on t-shirts as well.

Though this has no explicit Jewish content, this brightly animated, amusingly told story of having pride in your name most definitely has a place in a Jewish library. Told in “cave person” language, *My Name is Wakawakaloch!* teaches kids to take the time to pronounce a friend’s name correctly, and to have pride in your name because it holds special meaning. This would be a great tool for conversations about where a name comes from, or how to be kind to friends. The endpapers include illustrations of other cave children and a guide on how to pronounce their names such as Sade, Deandre, and Chana. Pair with Rachel Vorst’s *I Have a Jewish Name!* (Hachai, 2020 - see above) for a name-themed story time.

Rebecca Levitan. Librarian II, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch

SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS


The Jews in town are preparing for Purim. The narrator (regrettably un-named) and her good friend Luis plan to join the fun. The girl explains the holiday, its story, and the customs that surround it to Luis. But the family goat Kitzel eats all of the hamantaschen. Luckily, Luis’ mother has masa (corn flour) and raisins, which make sweet replacements for the traditional pastries. On Purim, the townspeople get a new treat.

While this story is fictional, it is based on fact; the Hebrew Ladies’ Benevolent Society of Tucson held a party in 1886 around the time of Purim. The Arizona Daily Star reported, “Tucson’s society has outdone itself in the name of sweet charity...” While it is a whimsical, fictional creation, *Sweet Tamales* is a reminder that Jews were everywhere in the Western United States and that they brought the holidays with them.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA


When Raya finds herself disappointed not to be participating in the school Purim play like her older brother and frustrated her mother has not made her Purim costume, the opportunity arises for her to make a special connection with her grandmother, Maman jooon (dear mother). Maman jooon shows Raya some colorful scarves and other treasures she’s kept from her childhood in Hamadan, Iran, for Raya to dress up as a “Persian Princess,” and shares her fond, bittersweet memories of celebrating Purim in Iran. Raya’s holiday celebration with her grandmother includes making traditional “Haman cookies,” delivering treats to neighbors, and putting on her own Purim play with Maman jooon donning her father’s robe to play the role of the king. Bright illustrations, Purim facts woven throughout, and nods to Persia’s rich history and culture add to this lovely intergenerational holiday story. Endnotes relay further facts about Purim and the history of Iran.

Martha McMahon, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA

Forty-one sparse words introduce the absolute most basic ideas of the Hanukkah holiday. Full color photographs illustrate the text and the endpapers encourage thought questions for kids. The stock photos include an inappropriate large image of a seven-branched Temple menorah instead of a proper nine-branched hanukkiah. There is no “why” in the short text, just statements such as “Let’s light the Menorah,” “families trade gifts each night,” and “let’s eat latkes and jelly doughnuts.” There is a short photo glossary explaining what each item is, as well as a brief index.

Perfect for early readers that need practice, the simple short sentences are given lots of context from the pictures. Perhaps if this had been fleshed out to 24 pages it would be a more compelling look at the holiday even for the tiniest readers and competitive with the abundance of Hanukkah books available.

*Rebecca Levitan. Librarian II, Baltimore County Public Library, Pikesville Branch*


In this updated edition, Kropf has retained most of the elements that made *It’s Challah Time!* a classic picture book. Boys and girls in a preschool setting participate in the various steps to make challah for Shabbat: adding the ingredients, mixing and kneading the dough, braiding the strands, and baking the sweet challah. You can almost taste and smell the challah as it is taken out of the oven! When it is ready, the children say the blessings over the Shabbat candles, grape juice, and bread. Included in this edition is the recipe for whole wheat honey challah, as well as blessings in Hebrew, transliterations, and translations.

The stunning photos are different from those in the original edition published in 2002, for they portray children who come from diverse backgrounds. Two points to note: not all the boys in the photos wear kippot; the labels on the packages are in Hebrew.

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

[Editors’ Note: According to the publisher, they “wanted a way to distinguish this book from the original version, in this very popular series, and originally planned for the new version to published on the 20th anniversary, but for several reasons, it ended up debuting a year earlier than originally planned, and they decided not to change the designation.”]
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All links to online resources were checked for accuracy on September 15, 2020
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