

2006 Sydney Taylor Award Speech

by Sarah Darer Littman

As the distinguished professor from Germany said, winning an award from the AJL makes one feel like part of the nobility. Given that, I feel it's only appropriate that I wear the tiara a friend gave me when I won the Sydney Taylor Award. It's the fashion accessory every award winner should have.

I really feel that it is all of you who should be up here – even though it might make things a little crowded – for having the courage to give a major Jewish book award to a book called “Confessions of a Closet Catholic”.

But I'm SO glad that you did. Because despite the title, and despite that fact that the book has the unique distinction of winning the Sydney Taylor Award AND being listed as one of the Catholic News Services “10 books suitable for Christmas Gift Giving”, “Confessions” truly is a Jewish book.

It was written as an answer to the question I often asked myself as a teen as a result of the unspoken message I got from my family that I should “be Jewish – but not too Jewish”. This can be best illustrated by the following example”: when my son Joshua (who, PG, will become a Bar Mitzvah this Saturday) was born, my parents gave me a copy of Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sack's book – “Will our grandchildren be Jewish?” But eight years later, when I decided to keep a kosher home and put mezuzahs on all my doorposts, they wanted to know why I was “going overboard.”

So it's always been a mystery to me, how exactly one is Jewish without being "too Jewish."

My religious journey, like Jussy's, has been somewhat circuitous, but for both of us it's been about trying to find our personal connection with G-d.

At a time when religion has become such a source of division in the world, I think one of the major themes in "Confessions" – that we should look for the commonalities of beliefs in our faiths, rather than focusing on the rituals that separate us, is so very important.

Thank you for this tremendous honor. I feel incredibly blessed.