

Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award

June 22, 2004

Presented to Brenda A. Ferber by Rachel K. Glasser

The Sydney Taylor Manuscript Committee is charged with seeking out potential writers for new works of fiction which will serve to deepen the understanding of Judaism for all children ages 8-11, Jewish and non-Jewish, and reveal positive aspects of Jewish life. Our committee is made up of a geographically and philosophically diverse group of SSC librarians who this year included Sandra Gottesman of Lake Worth, Florida; Aileen Grossberg of Montclair, NJ; Susan Pankowsky of Nashville, TN; Barbara Sutton of San Diego, CA; advisor Paula Sandfelder of Atlanta, GA; and I am Rachel Glasser, chairperson, of Teaneck, NJ.

We read and reviewed ten manuscripts this past year from authors in New York City and state; Los Angeles, California; Toronto, Canada; Durham, North Carolina; Swathmore, Pa.; and Chicago, Illinois; one being the assistant dean of a well-known college. We received a greater number of inquiries, requests for competition rules, and manuscripts than we have in the past five years. We would like to express our appreciation to Nanette Stahl for her hard work on the creation of the AJL publicity database, which enabled us to better publicize the manuscript competition.

The manuscripts we received told many diverse stories - a 12-year-old girl's involvement in the kidnapping of animals that is tied into Jewish lore and mysticism, a sweatshop Cinderella on the Lower East Side who is focused on women's rights, a strong and loving relationship between a granddaughter and her sick grandmother, the issue of Jewish identity and being the new kid in town in a very assimilated community, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and the heroes who escaped through the sewers, a middle child who experiences intense feelings of being left out during her sister's Bat Mitzvah celebration, short stories about the immigrant's experience told through a child's eyes, and a middle school romance involving a Russian immigrant.

The committee looked for quality writing, an exciting plot, well-developed strong characters, and a truly special story.

We found all of that and much more in our winner story, Cara's Kitchen by Brenda A. Ferber. Eleven-year-old Cara Segal has a close relationship with her parents, her sister, and especially with God until a tragic house fire changes everything in her life. As Cara struggles to deal with her grief, she questions God's role in her life. Family and friends try to surround Cara and her father, but they must first handle the reality of the fire and deal with the personal feelings of culpability and acceptance before they can move ahead with their lives. Their

losses touch the reader is a very personal and loving way, and we found our hearts aching along with the characters. This realistic story was the unanimous choice of our judges, and we feel that it will be a valuable addition to Jewish children's literature, in the rich tradition set forth by Sydney Taylor.

Brenda Ferber lives in Deerfield, Illinois with her husband Alan, who is here with her tonight. They have three children, two cats and a frog. When she's not writing, Brenda enjoys yoga, reading, baking, and creating scrapbooks. She has a degree in creative writing from the University of Michigan. Two of her short stories will be forthcoming in Ladybug Magazine.

The Sydney Taylor Manuscript Committee is pleased to present this year's prize to Brenda Ferber for Cara's Kitchen.