

**SYDNEY TAYLOR AWARD WINNER FOR OLDER READERS:
ACCEPTANCE SPEECH**

Catherine Reef

I was very surprised when Linda Silver called to tell me that I had won the Sydney Taylor Book Award, because I do not consider myself especially knowledgeable about Jewish history or culture. I can only say that if I have written an outstanding book of Jewish content, then much of the credit belongs to Sigmund Freud.

Freud was not a religious man, but to a very large extent, his Jewish heritage shaped who he was. For example, his heritage limited his career choices as a young man in nineteenth century Vienna. Knowing he could have no future in government, his first area of interest, he turned to science and medicine. He was treated as an outsider by his fellow students at the University of Vienna because he was a Jew. Also, because he was a Jew, as an old man, he was forced to leave Vienna, his lifelong home, at the time of Nazi occupation. Of course, because he was a famous man, he and his family were more fortunate than so many others.

But Freud's Jewish heritage had a more profound influence, because it affected the way he thought. He often used the figures and mythology of the Bible to make sense of the world. If Jung was Joshua, then Freud was Moses; to see psychoanalysis accepted by the medical community was to enter the Promised Land. His final book, *Moses and Monotheism* was a meditation on the history of his people.

So I think that writing a worthwhile book of Jewish content is the natural outcome of creating a balanced, well-rounded portrait of Freud, which is what I set out to do. Particularly because so much that has been written about Freud in recent years has been negative, I tried in my book to be fair—to introduce Freud's ideas as well as the concerns of nineteenth and twentieth century critics, and to encourage readers to make up their own minds about Freud's writings.

Sometimes I am asked one question again and again with regard to a particular book. With Sigmund Freud (for a reason that I have yet to determine), the question is, "Why?" Why did I choose to write about Freud?

The question actually has a simple answer. I wanted to write another biography, and I was looking for a challenging subject. I hope always to grow as a writer, and the way to do that is to take on challenging projects. At the time, my son was in high school, and I noticed that some of his friends had a strong interest in psychology. My needs as a writer, then, together with the young people's interest in the mind, led me to Freud.

One of the pleasures of writing this book was to read from Freud's works. Freud was a gifted writer; in fact, the author John Irving has called him, "a novelist with a

scientific background.” Irving said, “I love reading Freud: the detail, the observations, the characters, the histories.”

It is a stretch to call Freud’s books works of fiction, but Irving is correct that Freud skillfully employed the novelist’s tools. The one he used to greatest effect was the metaphor. To Freud, for example, the chain of thoughts and memories created by free association became the changing scenery viewed from the window of a moving train; the life story related by a patient beginning psychoanalysis he compared to an “unnavigable river.” the years of World War I in Europe were a long, dark night at the North Pole. As I worked on his biography, these and other metaphors appealed to my imagination. Through a process similar to free association, pictures came to mind, influencing the choice of illustrations for the book. The book therefore contains photographs of a turn-of-the-century train traveler and a rushing river, as well as other images inspired by Freud.

I was fortunate to work with an astute and skillful editor at Clarion Books, Jennifer Greene, and an innovative designer, Joann Hill. Producing a book is a cooperative effort, and I wish to acknowledge their contributions.

Finally, I want to thank you, the Association of Jewish Libraries, for honoring my book with the Sydney Taylor Book Award and for your commitment to children’s literature. There is no more important audience for literature than our children. They deserve the best that we can give them.