Meet Jerry Krautman, AJL’s Development Associate
DINA HERBERT

Last January at our midwinter Board/Council meeting in Baltimore, I commissioned a committee consisting of board, council and other members to investigate the possibility of hiring an Executive Director for AJL. The committee was composed of the following AJL members: Kathy Bloomfield (Committee Chair), Dina Herbert, Jackie Ben-Efraim (secretary), Emily Bergman, Kathy Bloch (resigned 3/19), Michelle Chesner, Rebecca Jefferson (resigned 5/19), Heidi Rabinowitz, Judy Weidman, Holly Zimmerman.

As requested, the committee made its recommendations to the AJL Board at the June 2019 Board meeting.

- After discussions about the strategic priorities that an Executive Director (ED) would support, it was determined that fundraising is our number one goal. Therefore, the committee decided to focus on fundraising, rather than a more administrative ED hire.
- The Committee discussed the critical skills and experience needed by the individual we are hiring, and determined:
  - We need a Fundraiser, a Development Associate, who will also do some grant writing and perform a few administrative functions.
  - This will be a part-time, contract position to start. Probably 20 hours per week. The individual will work remotely from home.
  - The person hired needs the following qualifications:
    - Excellent written and oral communication skills
    - Proven track record of successful fundraising
    - Experience with the Jewish world, Libraries or Non-profit Associations
    - Must have a laser focus on fundraising and able to start up quickly
    - An outward facing point of view to get AJL’s name out there
  - Within six months, the contractor hired needs to do the following:
    - Create a Case for Giving
    - Begin creating an endowment
    - Demonstrate an increase in AJL membership
- The Committee sent a job description out to various job listing sites to see if there might be interest in the job. We received over 75 applications. A small group of committee members reviewed the applications and recommended two individuals for the Board to interview.

I am excited to report that effective August 19, 2019, I have signed a contract for Jerry Krautman to work on behalf of AJL as our new Development Associate. Jerry lives and works in Los Angeles, CA. He brings a wealth of knowledge and an extraordinary depth of experience to AJL. You will all have the opportunity to meet him at our 2020 Conference in Evanston IL. If you have any questions regarding this, please contact me at dina.herbert@gmail.com. If you would like to speak to Jerry sooner, you may contact him at jkrautman@sbcglobal.net.

Please join me in welcoming Jerry to our AJL community!
AJL Online

To subscribe to Hasafran, please see instructions at
https://lists.service.ohio-state.edu/mailman/listinfo/hasafran
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A Note from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the first issue of the newly combined AJL News and Reviews! With this new format, we are able to combine the best of both worlds: news for and about Jewish libraries and the latest reviews of Jewish literature. We hope you will find the new format interesting and enjoyable and consider contributing to future issues by sharing your Chapter Chatter or by becoming a reviewer. Guidelines for contributions are detailed on the AJL website.

You may also notice that I am a recent addition to our News and Reviews team. A special thank you to our long serving former editor-in-chief, Uri Kolodney, for his patient guidance during this transition and to all of the other editors for their kind welcome.

Please feel free to reach out to me with comments and suggestions for News and Reviews at general-editor@jewishlibraries.org.

Many thanks,
Sally Stieglitz

Thank you, Uri Kolodney

With this issue, longtime AJL News and Reviews editor-in-chief, Uri Kolodney, is stepping down from his editorial position. Uri is the Film and Video and Hebrew, Jewish, and Israel Studies Liaison Librarian at University of Texas Libraries, University of Texas at Austin. He has served as editor-in-chief of AJL News and AJL Reviews for the past nine years; the first issue Uri edited was September/October 2010.

During his tenure as editor-in-chief, Uri led the move from print to digital, together with the split of the Newsletter printed version into two digital publications - AJL News and AJL Reviews, which were first posted online on February 2011. Our profound thanks to Uri for his dedicated service to AJL and AJL News and Reviews!!
The 54th Annual AJL Conference was held at the Woodland Hills Marriott from June 17-19 and was, by all accounts, a great success. The program book was filled with useful news and information, and we have gleaned some of the highlights here for you:

- Long-time member Elliot H. Gertel received the Fanny Goldstein Merit Award at our opening luncheon.
- The hotel foyer provided room for an interesting poster display of “Jewish Vintage Fashion” from all over the world, offered at no charge by Tel Aviv’s Beit Ha’Tfusot.
- Denise Blumenfeld from Panama City, Panama was the recipient of the Groner-Wikler Scholarship to attend the conference.
- Wednesday’s Feinstein Lecture was presented by Todd Presner, chair of the Digital Humanities Program at UCLA. His topic was how his team curates and publishes digital archives called The Case of Mapping Jewish Los Angeles.
- A number of Lithuanian librarians were able to attend and presented a Monday session about pre-war and Soviet libraries there.
- Educator Leora Raikin talked about the “David Labkovski Project” – Teaching the Holocaust through the Arts and offered a short virtual reality experience.
- Genealogical researcher Judy Baston was able to access the lists of patrons of the Vilna Ghetto Library, and shared documents that provided insight into how this library functioned during the war years.
- Marjorie Gann and Annette Goldsmith shared a session in which they commented upon international youth literature with either Jewish content or content relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- The Shoah Foundation, a local Los Angeles institution, provided a session explaining how they map data from their archives and how their immense database is accessed from around the world.
- Heidi Rabinowitz lead a fun “Live Podcast” session with guests Joni Sussman from Kar-Ben and popular children’s author, Barney Salzberg.
- The “Best New Fiction for Adult Readers” session was again presented by the AJL Jewish Fiction Award committee and proved to be a big hit. Two of the three winners appeared: Mark Sarvas and Scott Nadelson.
- Tuesday’s full slate of sessions included topics such as: Holocaust Databases, Digitization, Information Literacy for High Schools, the popular Sydney Taylor Awards and Library of Congress Update sessions, Maggie Anton, Rachel Adler and Malka Simkovich discussing Jewish texts, Persian Literature with author Gina Nahai, and much more.
- Author and illustrator Eugene Yelchin received a standing ovation from the packed room at the author lunch after his talk about the importance of reading in the Soviet Union, where he was raised. We were delighted to host 30 authors and sell their books!
- Our Awards ceremony on Tuesday evening was attended by over 150 people and the speeches from all the honorees were moving and memorable.
- After some interesting morning sessions at the hotel on Wednesday, we boarded buses that took us to American Jewish University for a short tour of the grounds. We were guided to the Sperber Library, the Ostrow Library, the Lowy Rare Book Room, the Sculpture Garden and the Mikveh.
- After our last lunch at AJU, many of us boarded buses again for our choice of three local tours: The Skirball Cultural Center, The UCLA Research Library, or the Library and Museum at the Getty Center.

The weather was great, the hotel was pleasant and comfortable, and the conference itself was lively and interesting. A huge thank you to the organizers and all the volunteers who made it happen.

Please make sure to mark your calendars for our 2020 Chicago conference at the Hotel Orrington in Evanston from June 29th – July 1st! We will be holding it in conjunction with the ALA conference in Chicago! Stay tuned for more information on HaSafraan.
In July 2019, The Palm Beach Post ran a story about the principal of a Boca Raton, Florida high school who refused to call the Holocaust a historical fact. The story was met with public fury that led to his removal (though at the time of writing, he has not been fired). In the wake of this event, it seems appropriate to highlight Holocaust resources that can help educators and families raise children who understand this crucial period of history and ensure their ability to apply the lessons of the Holocaust to our own times.

Here, then, are a few selections from the 200+ Holocaust titles that have been recognized by the Association of Jewish Libraries’ Sydney Taylor Book Award committee over the years. There are fiction and nonfiction titles for children and teen readers. Each title’s recognition status and age range is provided at the end of the annotation.


This well-researched, large format book describes the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party, and World War II and its aftermath, through the eyes of twelve ordinary young people in Germany including those who participated in the Hitler Youth movement and those who resisted. In *The Boy Who Dared*, a 2009 Notable Book for Older Readers, Bartoletti takes one episode from Hitler Youth and turns it into a thought-provoking novel. (Nonfiction, 2006 Notable Book for Older Readers)


A stunning account of the mission to capture Adolf Eichmann by an elite team of Israeli spies is dramatically brought to life by Neal Bascomb. (Nonfiction, 2014 Award Winner for Teen Readers)


The author describes her experiences during World War II when she and her family were sent to the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz. Bitton-Jackson continues her story in *My Bridges of Hope: Searching for Life and Love After Auschwitz*, a 1999 Notable Book for Older Readers, and *Hello, America: A Refugee’s Journey from Auschwitz to the New World*. (Nonfiction, 1997 Honor Book for Older Readers)


In graphic novel format, a grandmother recounts to her granddaughter her experiences as a hidden Jewish child in Nazi-occupied France during the Holocaust. The grey and brown-tinted illustrations portray a dark and scary time. However, the text and images provide a gentle introduction to the Holocaust for elementary grade and middle grade readers. (Fiction, 2015 Award Winner for Older Readers)


This graphic adaptation brings Anne Frank and the other residents of the Secret Annex to life. Though it makes the fear inherent in their situation clear, it also conveys plenty of ordinary, even humorous moments, reminding readers just how real the people were. (Nonfiction, 2019 Notable Book for Older Readers)

This powerful story is based on the life of Dita Kraus and her protection of a handful of books in the Auschwitz concentration camp. It shows the importance of hope in the darkest of times. (Fiction, 2018 Award Winner for Teen Readers)


Lebowitz attended the first week of the trial of Oskar Groening, known as “the bookkeeper of Auschwitz.” She blogged about her experience, and as the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, went through a myriad of emotions. Kacer chronicles both her account and the trial testimony. (Nonfiction, 2018 Honor Book for Teen Readers)


The late Leon Leyson has created an inspiring memoir about his experiences during the Holocaust. He was one of the youngest children on Oskar Schindler’s list. (Nonfiction, 2014 Honor Book for Older Readers)


Irena Sendler was a brave Christian Polish woman who rescued thousands of Jewish children during World War II. Her story is also portrayed in two excellent picture books, Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto, a 2012 Notable Book for Older Readers by Susan Goldman Rubin, illustrated by Bill Farnsworth, and Irena’s Jars of Secrets, a 2012 Honor Book for Older Readers by Marcia Vaughan, illustrated by Ron Mazellan. (Nonfiction, 2017 Notable Book for Older Readers)


When her family is upended in Nazi-occupied Poland, teenager Chaya Linder is determined to make a difference. Circumstances send her from being a courier, to raiding Nazi supplies, to finally the biggest mission of all, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. (Fiction, 2019 Notable Book for Teen Readers)


The authors presents a sampling of actions, efforts, and heroism with the hope that they can play a role in helping to correct the damaging and persistent belief that Jews ‘went like sheep to the slaughter.’ Five years of research results in an important informational book, with back matter that includes a pronunciation guide, chronology, source notes, detailed bibliography, and an index. (Nonfiction, 2013 Honor Book for Teen Readers)


Told in verse, this is the story of Sylvia Perlmutter, one of twelve surviving children, who hid in the Lodz Ghetto with her family. (Fiction, 2007 Honor Book for Older Readers)


Karl Stern, an assimilated fourteen-year-old Jew living in 1930s Berlin, becomes the unlikely student of boxing champion and source of German pride, Max Schmeling. A coming of age novel that entwines Karl’s personal struggles with the historical ones of
the period including “degenerate” art and the Nazi menace, well-developed characters and a tense plot propel this page turner. (Fiction, Award Winner for Teen Readers)


This beautifully illustrated novel tells the story of teen Holocaust survivor Gerta as she struggles to reconcile her identity and desires in the wake of tragedy. (Fiction, 2019 Award Winner for Teen Readers)


Death narrates the story of Leisl Meminger, a Lutheran girl in Nazi Germany who sustains herself and those close to her, including the Jewish man hidden in her basement, with her love of books and reading. An engaging story that resonates with the full spectrum of human emotions and experiences. (Fiction, 2007 Award Winner for Teen Readers)

*Editor’s note: This article appeared originally as a blog post on AJL’s “People of the Books” Blog on August 12, 2019.*

**Cleveland Public Library Partners with Beit Shean Public Library**

**By Erika Marks, Outreach and Programming Coordinator, Youth, Cleveland Public Library**

In June, 2017, Felton Thomas, Director of the Cleveland Public Library (CPL), visited Beit Shean with 41 civic community members. After observing the uniqueness of their local library, he was inspired to create an information-sharing partnership between the Jewish Federation and the Cleveland Public Library (CPL). The Beit Shean Public Library is operated by youth volunteers, with 1-2 adults in the building.

In December, 2018, Aaron Mason, CPL Director of Outreach and Programming Services, and I visited Beit Shean, Israel, The goal of our visit was to get an understanding of their youth-led programming model to replicate in the United States at the Cleveland Public Library. On the first night, we were greeted by highly enthusiastic and talented youth from Beit Shean, who organized a welcoming event where we participated in Hanukkah. Throughout our visit, the same students, known as “The Beehive,” facilitated amazingly detailed workshops, along with the library supervisor, Eran. Topics included but were not limited to how to recruit youth volunteers, identifying skills, mapping talents, and embracing failures.

In addition to learning about the Beit Shean volunteer model, we were able to provide two workshops on early literacy and digital literacy. Staff from the nearby Valley of Springs library and other community members who work with youth also participated. I shared Every Child Ready to Read resources, mentioning the five practices: singing, talking, playing, writing, playing as a guide to developing programs for early learners and their families. This information was fascinating for workshop participants, as they have never viewed themselves as non-traditional educators.

During our visit, we explored Beit Shean and interacted with a significant number of community members while learning about Jewish culture. Time was set aside for us to recap and brainstorm on how to replicate this model at CPL.

Currently, CPL Outreach is working on an itinerary, as the Beit Shean Israel Delegation is visiting Cleveland, Ohio during the week of September 18th, 2019. Teen patrons from the Cleveland Public Library East 131 Branch are learning the youth-led model. The Cleveland students are thrilled to have a chance to speak and engage with two teens and their leader from Beit Shean.
Batwoman—the CW network’s latest DC Comics-inspired superhero TV show—will feature their first lead character who is not only an out lesbian but also Jewish, as she is in the comics.

Interestingly, the latter identity has prompted greater commentary. Some Jews are unhappy that a non-Jew is playing the role, and that a flashback to the character’s bat mitzvah was cut from the premiere, though the producers say that was about time, not reticence. But what got my attention was a Facebook comment that asked, “Why does it even matter if she’s Jewish?”

I’m a comic book writer (I co-created Blue Devil and Amethyst, Princess of Gemworld for DC) now working on a middle-grade prose fantasy steeped in Jewish folklore. This past winter I attended a Highlights Foundation symposium for writers of Jewish kidlit, and the “Why does it matter?” question about Batwoman feels very much related to a big topic of discussion (and frustration) that came up there: publishers’ resistance to bringing broad Jewish content to young readers.

Jewish content was for decades most notable by its absence in comics and in American pop culture generally, despite the outsized role Jews have long played in shaping that culture. We almost always told stories as All-American, non-ethnic and as assimilated as possible.

Which is not to say that signifiers (and in the case of MAD Magazine, more than signifiers) of Jewishness couldn’t be found. One of my favorite Superman stories, “Superman’s Return to Krypton” (1960), can easily be read as a mournful ode to the lost world of European Jewry, though it’s highly doubtful the writer and Superman co-creator Jerry Siegel was conscious of that.

In the postwar period, when Jews who present as white were better able to avoid much of the bigotry that other ethnic and racial minorities couldn’t, we did not, for the most part, tell stories that emphasized our differences. And because we looked like them, we could more easily imagine we were Clark Kents and Bruce Waynes and Lois Lanes.

Two experiences from my own work highlight the powerful urge to assimilate. Amethyst, created in the early 1980s, was a girl named Amy Winston, and in my mind the surname had once been Weinstein; but I never said so in the comic. A few years later, a Jewish editor told me that a character whose ethnicity was unspecified came off to him as “too Jewish.”

I think it was not until comics creators from other ethnic and racial groups insisted on seeing faces like their own in superhero comics that most Jewish superhero writers got comfortable putting their Jewishness out there. Now we know that Ben Grimm, the Fantastic Four’s rock-hard super-strong Thing, whose backstory was drawn from the life of his artist creator Jack Kirby (born Jacob Kurtzberg), is Jewish. And the X-Men’s arch-foe Magneto was retconned (from “retroactive continuity,” which works something like midrash) into a survivor of the Shoah, adding new depth of meaning to his willingness to defend mutantkind by violent means rather than seek acceptance from ordinary humans.

Most readers and viewers (not all, sadly) have come to see the value in featuring black and Asian and Latinx characters in all sorts of roles in America’s popular culture. As Jews start to unassimilate ourselves a bit—to challenge the idea held by much of white Christian America that we’re just another version of Christians (a kind of “not yet fully Christian”)—I hope others will see the value in having Jewish lives also represented, and stop asking why it matters.

Dan Mishkin is a comic book writer who has worked on superheroes—including a notable run on Wonder Woman—as well as sci-fi, sword & sorcery, funny animals, and a longform documentary comic about the Kennedy assassination and the Warren Report. He currently writes the webcomic Amazon Academy.

Editor’s Note: This article is expanded from an original Facebook post by the author and reprinted with his permission.
This year marks the 200th anniversary of the Wissenschaft des Judentums movement, or the birth of Jewish Studies as an academic discipline. For the 22nd issue of Judaica Librarianship, the editorial board invites you to submit papers on the contribution of libraries and archives, as well as individual librarians and archivists or librarian–scholar collaborations, to the scholarly field of Jewish Studies. Papers could focus on collection building, in particular collections that contributed to the formation and development of Jewish studies; description of, and discovery systems for library and archival objects, including library catalogs, library guides, archival finding aids, or metadata creation for digitized collections; bibliographies or other reference tools; reference, research, and instruction services, including online tutorials; and library outreach efforts, including interaction with scholars and students on social media. Other papers that meet the journal’s scope are welcome as well. For JL’s submission guidelines and policies, see the journal homepage at https://ajlpublishing.org/jl/; or contact the editor for any questions. The deadline is January 31, 2020.

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

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In this, the third of Rabbi Nachum Amsel’s Encyclopedias, the author continues to explicate the values and principles that underlie Jewish laws and precepts as they apply to contemporary Jews. In particular, this volume focuses on those laws governing interaction between Jews and the people around them, be they Jewish or otherwise. Amsel covers a diverse range of issues: in addition to considering topics such as war, modesty, *tzedakah*, and hospitality, he considers more seemingly “modern” concerns such as climate change, advertising and universal health care, weighing how Jewish legal sources apply to them. With regard to war, Amsel starts by citing *Sanhedrin* 37a to argue that “For Judaism, life itself is the highest value,” and fighting with one’s fellow man was not a matter to be considered lightly. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that there are some instances in which war was required, and he describes instances, both historical and scriptural, where Jews were obliged to fight. Referencing the *Talmud Bavli*, he notes that even a groom on his wedding night must fight if needed. (*Sotah* 44b, codified by Maimonides, *Hilchot Malachim* 7:4). With regard to healthcare Amsel cites Rabbi Eliezer Waldenberg, noting that “He emphatically ruled that the Jewish community is indeed responsible for universal health care” (*Responsa Ramat Rachel* 2:3, 7. 28:13). In addition to the numerous source citations found in footnotes throughout the book, Amsel has also collected many pages of Hebrew references for every one of the topics discussed. Thus, it seems that Amsel is developing a new code emphasizing Judaism as a way of life in the modern world. In this compendium he connects values with traditional Jewish sources as a guide for Jews today and demonstrates that “every moral decision and issue, large and small, has a normative Jewish response.” For the modern English reader, it is it is a superbly accessible overview.

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante.


Professor Jerold Auerbach has written extensively on Jewish American history. In this book he tackles *The New York Times* and its coverage of Israel. The story begins with Adolph Ochs (a southerner and son-in-law of Isaac Mayer Wise) who bought the newspaper in 1896. Soon after that, he posted a new statement on its masthead, “All the News That’s Fit to Print.” Yet, as Auerbach demonstrates, the paper has consistently expressed hostility towards Zionism and Israel for the past 120 years. As an assimilated Reform Jew with a fierce loyalty towards America, Ochs was opposed to the idea of a separate Jewish peoplehood; he once wrote to Lillian Wald that “I almost have an obsession on the subject.” As one example, while the *New York Times* reported on the voyage and rejection of the S.S. *St. Louis* in 1939, it did not acknowledge that almost all of its passengers were Jewish refugees. Och’s own anti-Zionist stance continued as a deeply engrained attitude in the newspaper’s editorials, opinion page and news coverage.

Auerbach’s book is divided into fourteen chronological chapters. It also covers the work of major correspondents from Joseph Levy in the 1920s and 30s through to David Shipler and Thomas Friedman in the 1980s and into the 2010s who have questioned and rejected Israeli practices. At the same time, Auerbach notes that the paper has been happy to trumpet scientific and social advances achieved by the Jews in the Holy Land from the 1920s until now.

Jerold Auerbach has performed an important service by presenting this trove of information about our most important American newspaper and its attitudes. Unfortunately, the prose is somewhat dense, and the price may be prohibitive for synagogue libraries. It is recommended primarily for academic institutions with an interest in American Jewish history.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA.
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Reviews of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

This beautifully illustrated (color photographs by Shira Hecht-Koller) Modern Orthodox Haggadah includes traditional Hebrew text, English translation, and transliteration. In addition, there are color coded instructions for conducting the Seder, introductory paragraphs and longer pieces for reading, stories to stimulate thought and spiritual connection, ideas and questions for discussion, humor, and a kids’ corner. Appendices include songs, additional readings, recipes, a glossary of commentators, and endnotes. An introduction presents the Haggadah, the Seder, as well as covering the preparations for Passover. The compiler, Rabbanit Adena Berkowitz, is scholar-in-residence and co-founder of Kol HaNeshamah, New York; she is the co-author of *Shaarei Simcha: Gates of Joy*, and a practicing therapist. Her attractive, family oriented, and richly supplemented Haggadah is an important, valuable contribution to the variety of haggadot available for celebrating Passover.

Susan Freiband, retired library educator, volunteer temple librarian, Alexandria, VA


Maimonides (1138-1204), preeminent expert and author of Jewish law and one of the greatest Jewish philosophers of all time was also a medical doctor. In his role as a doctor, serving as court physician to Saladin sultan of Egypt, he also composed ten works on medicine. One of the ten works is a treatise commissioned by an anonymous high official within the Egyptian government to increase his sexual potency for relations with the large number of slave girls under his command.

The treatise reads like a recipe book, containing foods and spices that Maimonides thought would be either conducive to or unfavorable towards achieving optimum sexual potency. Sperm was considered a residue of digested food and overly hot and spicy foods were considered detrimental to sexual vigor. Beneficial foods were those that were moistening, heating and produced flatulence. Maimonides also wrote that there are numerous psychological factors that increase sexual potency. Positive emotions such as “joy, happiness, fun and laughter” are beneficial, while “sadness, worry and anxiety” decrease the lust.

This book has three parts: the first is the original Arabic text and translation; the second part focuses on three different Hebrew translations of the treatise, and the third part provides an introduction to the two Latin translations, along with the actual translation text.

Maimonides considered proper sexual behavior of the utmost importance. A healthy sexual life led to a healthy body—and only a healthy body could truly obtain knowledge of God which was the highest form of worship for Maimonides. This book is aimed at the academic interested in Maimonides or medieval conceptions of nutrition, aphrodisiacs and sexuality.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel


This intelligent collection of essays on the subject of trust is divided into four sections: To Swear an Oath, The Business of Trust, Intimacy of Trust and The Politics of Trust.

Most of the content deals with Jews and Jewish communities in the medieval and early modern period: their affiliations and their contacts with the non-Jewish communities in which they lived. This historical view of Jewish society from a different perspective offers keen insights into the functioning of the community. Since many Jews were merchants, and money lenders, they always had strong ties to the outside communities; but in order to be successful, they also needed to establish trust between themselves and their neighbors and within the Jewish community itself. The book covers Jewish communities worldwide. It is consistently well written by all contributors and holds the reader’s interest throughout.

One example of building and maintaining trust will illustrate some of the complex factors involved. In
chapter seven, entitled ‘Jewish Peddlers and Non-Jewish Customers in the New World,’ Hasia Diner, Director of the Goldstein-Goren Center for American Jewish History, provides an in-depth picture of the life of the Jewish traveling peddler, a ubiquitous figure in the New World. Diner informs us that the Jewish peddlers ‘had to instill trust in their potential customers’ many of whom were women alone at home without their husbands; the Jew arriving to sell his wares was clearly an outsider. The peddler, on his part, also needed to trust the customer since he was selling his goods on the installment plan and would have to receive the full payment for merchandise already delivered over time. One can hardly imagine this situation in today’s trustless society.

The book is scrupulously documented allowing the reader to follow up with further information on any given aspect of this topic. Highly recommended for all adult and secondary school Judaica collections.

Marion M. Stein, retired librarian


Occasionally an historical work provides the breadth and details of an era that forever changes our perceptions of that period. Judah Cohen’s book accomplishes this feat for Jewish music in America in the nineteenth century. Very few people actually know much about Jewish music history to begin with, as it’s not a subject taught in many schools or colleges. Cantorial seminaries spend little time teaching historical musicology. College courses on Jewish music are usually general surveys that must skim the surface, covering vast periods of time. While purposely limited in scope, Cohen’s work fleshes out and provides a context on American Jewish worship music previously missing. Delving into primary source materials utilizing digital technologies, Cohen has uncovered a treasure trove of evidence. A picture emerges about the changes and challenges Jews experienced while developing and asserting their synagogue culture in the United States. Musical legacies of the last fifty years in synagogue music are the direct result of that experimentation. Cohen puts together a picture of their music and shines a spotlight on a few individuals as case studies. He starts with the earliest period of English influence, moves to the dominance of German Jewry in mid-century, and concludes the century with the ‘Americanization’ of Jewish synagogue music. He investigates the men (unfortunately mostly leaving out the women) behind the musical changes, as American Judaism started splitting into defined movements, all the while bringing to light how music served as “a central domain for expressing Jewish identity and practice” in 19th century America. Highly Recommended.

Judith S. Pinnolis, Berklee College of Music/Boston Conservatory at Berklee

A first-hand account of the raw reality of prejudice and one woman’s courage and ability to make a difference. What I Have to Tell is an intimate, haunting memoir that recounts the remarkable history and set of happenstances that shaped one woman’s life and forever changed the lives of countless women and children across the globe. Dr. Justin engages readers with stories from her past that seem to test reality and speak to the profound fluidity and resilience of the human spirit. As a final offering, this is what she has to tell.

A woman recollects a childhood in Germany upended by the Nazis–and her determination to begin anew without forgetting the past. ... A survivor’s simply and beautifully conveyed remembrance, powerful and edifying.


WHAT I HAVE TO TELL: A Memoir, Renate G. Justin, MD
Available at renategjustinmd.com

This volume is the final volume to the Anchor Bible Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel. The first two volumes were authored by the late Moshe Greenberg. Stephen L. Cook, the author of the third volume, is a specialist in biblical prophecy. This commentary follows in the footsteps of Moshe Greenberg’s earlier volumes in three key ways: 1. Cook focuses his interpretations on the “received, canonical form” of the text and does not posit any reconstructions of earlier stages of transmission; 2. The text is read in close conjunction with the prophet’s source texts in the Priestly stratum of the Pentateuch; and, 3. Cook incorporates “traditional pre-modern Jewish commentators.” Cook seeks to improve upon Greenberg’s methods by engaging with: 1. 3D visualizations of Ezekiel’s vision of the temple in chapters 40-48; 2. the distinction between the Priestly stratum and the later Holiness stratum, in particular the Zadokite tradition reflected in Holiness School and Ezekiel; and, 3. the significance of divine anthropomorphism to Ezekiel in relation to its dependence upon Zadokite/Holiness traditions.

The volume follows the standard structure of an Anchor Bible Commentary: an introduction that outlines the author’s method and theoretical approach as well as the textual and intellectual history of the Book of Ezekiel; division of the chapters into units; a Translation, Notes, and Comments section for each unit. The author has provided an Appendix with links to images based on passages in Ezekiel 40-48 that are posted online. These images are a collection of 3D renderings and artistic creations, some by the author and some by other individuals. It is disappointing that there is no information provided about these images, for example, how they were created, information about the creator beyond their name, if they are published elsewhere. Some of the links do not work. A single website with these images would have been a more user-friendly way to access these resources. The author does refer to these images throughout his commentary and notes, which is helpful.

The Comments and Notes, not surprisingly, reply heavily on the work on Priestly material by Jacob Milgrom and Israel Knohl, as well as Walther Zimmerli and Daniel Block’s earlier commentaries on Ezekiel. Cook’s “Notes” and “Comments” maintain the high standard expected from this series. In addition, he regularly proposes original arguments for textual and interpretive issues raised by the text, while also referencing the scholarly consensus. Cook acknowledges the complexity of translating and interpreting Ezekiel 40-48 due to the high percentage of corrupt phrases and unknown, architectural vocabulary. He makes heavy use of the Septuagint to resolve these problems which, while highly advisable, in theory violates his initial claim to prioritize the “received, canonical form” of the text.

This volume represents an important contribution to the field of biblical studies in at least three areas: 1. Completion of the commentary on Ezekiel for one of the most important commentary series in Hebrew Bible (though coming twenty-one years after the publication of volume 2, it begs the question, Would it have been better to start from scratch?); 2. Introducing digital images into the commentary genre. While this was not done in the most user-friendly way, it is an important addition to the genre in a field still beginning to explore the digital humanities; and, 3. Producing a high quality, scholarly commentary that will be of great service to scholars in biblical studies, both for teaching and research.

Anne K. Knafl, Bibliographer for Religion, Philosophy, and Jewish Studies, University of Chicago Library


You know you’re reading an academic biography when the author is passionately trying to convince the reader that the subject is actually less dramatic than his reputation suggests. Which is not to suggest that *Dissident Rabbi* is dull by any means; it is thoroughly absorbing cover to cover. However, Dweck is attempting to dispel certain images, both positive and negative, of Sasportas cultivated by various writers with their own agendas. Little is known about Sasportas’ early life, but he came to prominence in 1665-1666 as a lone voice of objection to the messianic claims of Shabbetai

Review of Nonfiction Titles for Adults

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Tsevi. The reader is treated to close readings of Sasportas’ writings and the theological arguments he used against the Sabbatians. The popular image of Sasportas is as a heresy hunter, famously promoted as such (in a positive light) by Jacob Emden and (in a negative light) by Gershom Scholem, but Dweck paints a portrait of a more nuanced and forgiving personality. Highly recommended.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University


Jews in Medicine is a very interesting and readable discussion of the history of Jews in medicine and Jewish physicians. The book begins with the physicians and medical theories of the Talmudic era and ends with contemporary physicians both living and deceased. The first six chapters are divided by geographical location and period: for example, physicians in Christian lands, Spain, Italy, Provence, and Turkey during the Gaonic period and before and after the expulsion from Spain. There is also a brief discussion of the rise of independent Jewish hospitals in the United States (once 113 and now only 22) and the reason for their decline.

The remainder of the book consists of short biographies and photographs of physicians in the modern era, from the nineteenth to twentieth century. This section is divided by specialties, for example surgery, radiation oncology, cardiology, and dermatology. The physicians listed in the last section were Zionists and contributed to the medical community in the State of Israel. The book includes a short bibliography and an alphabetical index of names.

Written in a non-technical and highly readable style, Jews in Medicine is recommended for synagogue and school libraries, as well as for patrons interested in Jewish history.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


Benjamin Epstein, a Jerusalem-based psychologist and rabbi, argues that Jewish mindfulness is both a traditional Jewish practice and essential to our spiritual life and growth. He sees mindfulness, termed yishuv hada’at, as not mere tranquility or peace of mind, but rather “settling into (unifying with) present moment awareness.” For Epstein, yishuv hada’at is a fundamental way of looking at life, indispensable for our basic spiritual life and growth. This state of mindfulness, he posits, can be achieved by anyone with practice and work. Living in the present moment is key to connecting to the Divine. We can be aware of the Divine in everyday life, and in our religious life, but to achieve this, we need a change of attitude; we need to let things be as they are, to slow down, be in the moment, to explore and control our thoughts.

Epstein uses the first part of the book to define yishuv hada’at, in part two, he identifies the attitudes and intentions necessary to obtain yishuv hada’at, and in part three, he shows how to work towards this state of being in one’s everyday activities. In the final section, Epstein illustrates how the observance of the Sabbath embodies the principles he has laid out.

This work is not a mindfulness handbook. Epstein presents a theology of living Judaism in the moment by bringing in prooftexts from a wide range of classical Jewish sources – rabbinic, philosophical, Kabbalistic, mussar, and Hassidic. Through his stories and topics, he weaves in psychological advice with mindfulness practices, while promoting the idea that his approach can be life changing. This is a work to study and a path to explore.

Living in the Presence is recommended for academic libraries and collections with Jewish spirituality for an Orthodox audience.

Harvey Sukenic, Hebrew College Library, Newton Centre, MA

Much has been written about the late Elie Wiesel and his life’s accomplishments, some of it while he was alive, but with more appearing since his death in 2016. Nadine Epstein, editor-in-chief of *Moment* magazine, which Elie Wiesel co-founded in 1975, edited this beautiful book in his memory. It includes an extensive photographic section and reflections about Wiesel by thirty-six prominent, eclectic individuals such as Wolf Blitzer, Sara Bloomfield, Thomas Buergenthal, Father Patrick Desbois, Ronald S. Lauder, Kati Marton, Itzhak Perlman, Mark Podwal, Natan Sharansky, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, and Ruth Wisse. An interview with Elisha Wiesel, Elie Wiesel’s son, also appears, as well as a section devoted to essays, speeches and writings by the great man himself.

This work will prove a rich resource for anyone studying and teaching about this complex and brilliant individual and great humanitarian. The supplementary discussion questions will be of assistance to teachers and to anyone interested in exploring further Wiesel’s long and complex life and many important accomplishments, including his efforts to bring about the establishment of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and his active involvement in bringing attention and assistance to human tragedies around the world. This book should be in all Judaica libraries.

*Michlean Amir, United States Holocaust Museum*


This is the story of Ben Helfgott who grew up in a small Polish village of Pietrkow, survived the Holocaust, and through perseverance and determination went on to great personal success. When the Nazis arrived in Pietrkow, they murdered Helfgott’s mother and one of his sisters. He and his father managed to survive in the town’s ghetto, working in a glass factory and a woodwork plant. Soon thereafter, they were sent off to the Buchenwald concentration camp where his dad died, and at some point in time, Helfgott was transferred to Thereisenstadt, the “showcase” concentration camp. Eventually, he was liberated by the Red Army and ultimately became one of “The Boys,” the 700 youngsters who made it to England. Eventually, Helfgott’s athletic prowess was recognized and he was selected to represent England in two Olympic Games as a champion weightlifter, in the 1956 summer Olympic Games and during the 1960 events. After his physical strength diminished, he became a businessman and set himself up to aid other survivors of the Shoah. As a part of this endeavor, he formed the 45 Aid Society, working closely with the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Holocaust Educational Trust. His work has received awards in Germany and in Poland.

This would be a fine read for anyone, but particularly Jewish youth and those with a strong athletic interest.

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


Marriage is one of the most important, and hopefully, enduring relationships in one’s life, but sadly it is often taken for granted. In this slim volume, Rabbi Friedman gives practical advice from which all marriages can benefit. He begins with “The Legs that Hold Up the Table,” which includes most of the specifically Jewish content of the book in terms of references to marriage and six *hashkafic* (guiding philosophical principles) for the program he describes. Then, one must look at his own faults and character defects and develop a healthy self-image and self-respect. He should then go on to accord his spouse the same love and respect, and to appreciate the relationship itself. Communication, especially when in disagreement is a key to a healthy marriage. The goal is not to “win,” but to resolve the issue. So is marital intimacy, if is approached from the Jewish perspective of a total encounter and not just physical release. Finally, Friedman provides “Glorious Opportunities to Shine,” including being respectful of in-laws and bringing your spouse small,
thoughtful gifts. He stresses that “the husband’s most important duty to his wife is to communicate his love, appreciation, and recognition of her breathtakingly exalted worth.” The author draws from both Jewish texts (Talmud, Proverbs, etc.) and secular sources, which are referenced at the end of the book.

First published in 1992 as Table for Two, the revised and expanded edition comes after seven reprints of the original work. With a rabbinic approbation, a Foreword, Acknowledgements, a Preface and an Introduction, there is a lot of lead up to the actual information. Most of the advice is common sense, which is often not so common in emotional situations. The succinct presentation and the avoidance of absolutes (never say “never”) make it easy to refer to key points. An excellent gift for the bride and groom, or anyone who wants to improve their marriage, the book is highly recommended for all Jewish libraries and an essential purchase for libraries serving counseling centers or Jewish Family Services.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


In an effort to provide a more user-friendly version of the Hirsch siddur, the Dr. Joseph Breuer Foundation with Feldheim Publishers has published this new revised edition. While there are many commentaries on the siddur, Hirsch’s translation and commentary reflect his unique philosophy of Torah im Derekh Eretz, aligning traditionally observant Judaism within the modern world and providing a bridge between the personal and universal experience.

Thanks to this new revised edition, Hirsch’s commentary can also be appreciated by laypeople. The size of the volume is smaller, more compact and more portable than some previously published Hirsch siddurim. The editor has provided highlighted text alerting the user to liturgical inserts, such as those recited for Purim, and occasionally asterisks appear to guide the reader and provide key cross references. The English text has been revised to reflect a modern idiom and the Hebrew font is presented in an easier-to-read format. Highly recommended for all libraries.

David B Levy, Lander College for Women, New York, NY


Alex Kerner’s excellent book on language in London Jewish book culture was read by this reviewer immediately after reading Rachel Kadish’s The Weight of Ink, a fiction title which takes place in the same time period and location. Kerner’s book is the perfect non-fiction partner to The Weight of Ink, describing through archival resources the tensions of the Jewish community in London in the years following the Jews’ official readmittance to England. His focus on books as an indicator of the importance of language in the London community is well presented, and Kerner’s clear description of the varying uses of Spanish, Portuguese, and Hebrew (and later, English) by the Sephardim in London gives a good survey of the changes in the community over the 150 years covered by the book. The detailed minutes of the London mahamad (council of elders) are ripe for this information, and Kerner cleverly mines its archive to reveal the difficulties and concerns faced by the Jews in early modern London through the lens of the mahamad’s control of the Jewish press. In the course of doing so, Kerner also sheds light on the intellectual culture of the community. Highly recommended.

Michelle Chesner, Columbia University, New York, NY


Rashi’s Commentary is such an ingrained part of how Jews read the Bible, it is difficult to imagine otherwise. But how did this work become a universal facet of the Jewish world, ubiquitous in all
Lawee expertly traces the trajectory of Rashi’s success, first in Ashkenaz then to Spain and beyond. Most fascinating are the resisting readers, few in number but passionate opponents who took issue largely with Rashi’s seemingly literal acceptance of Midrashim, a view that both offended the rationalist sensibilities of hardcore Maimonidians as well as opened Judaism up for the ridicule of Christians. Highly recommended.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University


Laura Limonic is a member of the US Latino Jewish community and a sociologist. This book is based on her dissertation and goes into great detail in order to provide the reader with a comprehensive view of how Latino Jews in the US have affected the communities in which they settle and how their lives have changed since coming here. The book explores where Latino Jews are from and the variety of ways in which they relate to one another, to the American Jewish community and American society at large. In many ways, the Latino Jewish immigrant experience is parallel to that of other nationalities of Jews who have made it to the US over the past 150 years. They formed their support groups based on cities and countries of origin. They maintained connections with family and friends back in the old country and maintained their unique customs to varying degrees. Limonic is very careful to set the scene for the various groups of ethnic Latinos and how their experiences as Jews in South and Central America affected their assimilation into American society. The writer makes the point that Jews in Latin America were subject to being segregated from the Catholic majority in ways that differed from how American Jews relate to the non-Jewish majority.

For this reader, the most interesting parts of the book are the personal stories. The fact that Jews are mainly white has given them an advantage in their process of assimilating into American society; however, most Latino immigrants to the US are not white and suffer the unfortunate but usual discrimination against people of color.

*Kugel and Frijoles* is replete with charts and statistical tables illuminating multiple aspects of the Latino experiences in their process of immigration and assimilation into America. This book is clearly NOT a cookbook as this reader mistakenly expected from its title. But there was no disappointment. Recommended for all communities with large Latino populations and all academic libraries.

Marion Stein, retired librarian


The third volume in this encyclopedia of camps and ghettos from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum deals with camps run by states that were allies of and collaborators with Nazi Germany. It provides readers with information about the extent of civilian and military cooperation in carrying out Hitler’s plan. A group of more than forty international contributors wrote over 700 articles covering sites under the control of ten countries. Black and white illustrations and detailed maps help readers locate these sites.

The book is organized alphabetically by country. Each section begins with an introduction that provides an overview of the country’s involvement with the war efforts. Alphabetical entries for individual camps and ghettos follow. The entries discuss the history of the camp, the types of prisoners there, the type of labor performed, which military units were involved, and whether the inmates were killed. They also provide information about prisoner culture, resistance and/or escapes, when and how the site was dissolved, and whether any personnel were tried for war crimes. All entries are signed.
There are notes and source lists as well. A list of abbreviations will help users locate source materials since the archives are abbreviated in the notes. A list of approximate rank equivalents is useful for researchers who want to understand the military groups running the camps. There are separate indexes for personal names, places, and organizations and enterprises as well. This is a very useful resource for anyone doing Holocaust research. It provides information that is otherwise difficult to find and makes it accessible. It also lays a foundation for further research.

Barbara M. Bibel, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA


Paul Mendes-Flohr has written an excellent biography of, in Buber’s own self-descriptive words, “a difficult and complicated man.” The story told by the author is one that takes its subject material from Buber’s own personal correspondences and writings, including his poetry written in response to different life events.

The book is divided into eleven chronological chapters. Chapter 1 focuses on Buber’s complicated childhood and his young adult years, where he was left motherless and raised, taught, and influenced by his father, grandmother, and uncle to the point at which he has children out of wedlock with the woman who will convert and eventually become his wife. Chapter 2 tells of Buber’s early writings and intellectual (Nietzsche) and political (Zionism) interests. Chapter 3 describes his academic journey both inside and outside of the formal university, and Chapter 4 centers on Buber’s decision to forgo his doctoral thesis and a profession in the university for the life of an author and public intellectual. At this point in his life, he published his first anthology about Hasidism intended for a general audience as well as books on Chinese, Finnish, and Celtic myths and legends. He also published a book called *Daniel: Dialogues on Realization* about “how the essential unity within a world of diversity may be realized.” In the following chapters, Mendes-Flohr follows Buber’s various intellectual and political developments, as well as his relocations to first Prague and then Palestine following the rise of the Nazis. Chapter 10 deals with Buber’s struggles with the Arab displacement occurring prior to, during, and immediately after the founding of the State, as well as his personal feelings and engagement with post-war Germany. The final chapter concludes with Buber’s last years as he grieves his late wife and deals with illness and loneliness, his involvement in a public debate with Gershom Scholem on his translation of the Bible, and of the people who sought him out in his later years for advice and inspiration.

Mendes-Flohr’s biography is an excellent introduction to the fascinating life and thought of one of modern Judaism’s preeminent philosophers. The book is recommended for the layperson and academic alike.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel
“...An enlightening read... his erudition and scope of reference invite the reader into the world of Torah scholarship and faith...”

In the Beginning of the Beginning

Alter Tzvi Amdurer

An in-depth compendium of scriptural, theological, philosophical, and moral issues of the Bible’s opening verses, from the beginning of Creation to expulsion from the Garden of Eden, as explored by ancient to contemporary Jewish commentators and thinkers.

HagbahPublishing.com

This a traditional Haggadah, with translation in English, supplemented by a commentary that is drawn from twelve books and three articles of Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits (1908–1992), a Modern Orthodox rabbi and educator. Almost two hundred excerpts are included here, and a quarter of these are from only four books, Faith after the Holocaust, 1973 (17 excerpts), Man and God, 1969 (13), God, Man, and History, 2004 (13), and Between Yesterday and Tomorrow, 1945 (11). The excerpts can be quite long, often over one or two pages, and introduced in the translation with a word or words in bold type; the same expression found in the translation is then used to introduce the excerpt. As the editor warns us in his introduction, the excerpts are all from published works “sometimes with abridgments and slight edits.” Recommended to all readers interested in the writings of Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


This insightful, well-written, original and important work is one of the best collections of over forty Torah essays in Biblical exegesis and Rabbinics in many years. As such, it is recommended for all libraries and to scholar and layman alike. Munk is best known for translating Torah commentaries by commentators from the 15th to 18th centuries, but also included in this volume are a selection of his public lectures and independent research. Some of these essays have been published before (for example in L’Eylah, the organ of Jews College in England, or in “Ascent” of Tzefat). Most of the essays included here, however, appear for the first time, providing a great boon to readers and enabling them to benefit further from the breadth and depth of Munk’s Torah knowledge and scholarship. Moreover, the fact that this volume is in English will allow his research to reach a much wider audience.

David B Levy, Lander College for Women, New York, NY


The author is a rabbi and a writer on many aspects of Torah. This volume is the last in a series on all five books of the Torah and deals with Leviticus (or, as Rabbi Nataf refers to it throughout: Vayikra). Each of the five chapters is dedicated to an aspect of Vayikra. Chapter one is devoted to the interpretation of sacrifice that is relevant for contemporary practice. Chapter two discusses the integrity of Vayikra as a free-standing book in its own right. Chapter three focuses on ritual purity, dietary customs, and reproduction. Chapter four contends with sin and family matters, and chapter five presents Vayikra as a book of laws with few stories contained within its pages. This book is a brief commentary on Leviticus, but it carries a unique perspective. Footnotes are scattered throughout but no index or bibliography are provided. This volume would be a worthwhile addition to any adult collection.

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


Ophir and Rosen-Zvi’s book traces the concept and use of the term “Goy” throughout Jewish history. Through textual analysis of the Bible and later Rabbinic literature, they show that the term was created later than previously thought by scholars. The different usages throughout Jewish history for the term to refer to non-Jews illustrates that the relationship between Jews and their neighbors, whether pagan, Christian, Muslim or other, is not and has never been a static one. This process of creating a religious and socio-economic Other to the Jew is dependent upon there being other people that serve as binary opposites, which can also be seen in other elements of Jewish life such as pure/impure, holy/profane,
etc. The authors trace the evolution of this binary relationship of Jew/non-Jew through the various changes in the usage of the term and others related to it such as “Nokhri” and “Ger” and the more general “gentile.” They attempt to show that the term as used in 21st century America and elsewhere is dependent on the earlier Rabbinic usages of the term to refer generally to anyone who is not Jewish, whatever their religious and socio-economic relationship was in the past or is today. Highlighting the many different periods of time, texts, and the different Jewish communities’ use of the term throughout history, their close reading of the texts involved illustrates the value of this kind of textual analysis for current scholarship and serves as an excellent example of how this kind of work should be conducted.

This book is recommended for academic libraries that want to fill lacunae in their collections related to Jewish customs/mores and the relationship between Jews and non-Jews, both in particular historical periods as well as in a more general sense.

Eli Lieberman, Judaica Librarian, HUC-JIR, New York, NY


Rosenau is also known as “the Jewish Fairy Godmother” and writes an advice column and maintains a website under this moniker. Her book is “for people who are trying to get unstuck from patterns of behavior or belief that keep them from change, want to stimulate their intuition, and live richly while following a spiritual path.” In the first section, “Getting to Know Us,” Rosenau introduces herself and how to use the book to its maximum potential. Section Two, “Our Messy Joys,” encourages the reader to look at past and current mistakes or sadness, sort them out, and move on. “Risking Change” discusses focusing on what you would like to change. Rosenau uses the Hebrew words and concepts of Hamakom, Hineini, and Kavanah to describe being in the zone, being present, and making a serious commitment or intention, respectively. This third section helps readers “figure out what you want so you can ask for it.” The two final sections provide advice for pursuing the things you want. At the end of each chapter are questions to help the reader apply the advice presented to their own situation.

The book incorporates quite a bit of Jewish content, including a discussion of the yetzer hatov and the yetzer hara (good and evil inclinations) several stories of Tanach and the Talmud, and a discussion of Tu B’Shevat as it relates to the way fruits (and humans) “protect ourselves and how we interact with the world.” Rosenau also draws on Eastern traditions like Buddhism and yoga, which some will see as enhancing the message and others as detracting from it. Rosenau’s life experience and straightforward approach are as encouraging and witty as any of the life coaches that are currently popular (Jen Sincero, Rachel Hollis), but too many gems are presented too succinctly—a sharper edit of both copy and layout would have enhanced the message greatly, with a more detailed expansion of ideas and some subheadings and bullet points. The excellent resources Rosenau quotes should have been included as a listing in the back matter. Libraries with self-help sections will want to include this one, otherwise an optional purchase.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel.


This collection of seventeen revised papers from a 2016 conference examines various types and aspects of anti-Zionism. One of the essays cites a definition of anti-Zionism by the Centre for Research on Antisemitism of the Berlin Technical University which describes the fundamental notion that the essays seek to criticize, i.e., “the portrayal of Israel as a state that is fundamentally negatively distinct from all others and which therefore has no right to exist.” The writers often aim at a deeper understanding of anti-Zionism by analyzing it in light of the history of anti-Zionism and antisemitism. For example, in his essay on anti-Zionist Israeli leftist Jews, Gil Ribak discusses the far
left’s opposition to Zionism in earlier historical periods. This collection is not a rightist attack upon
the left, however, for another of the essayists speaks of “the inescapable need to create a Palestinian
state alongside Israel;” another discusses neo-Nazi groups in the Czech Republic, and Karen Stogner’s
paper deals with the value of intersectionality and its misuse by anti-Zionists. Recommended for
larger collections on anti-Zionism or antisemitism.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University

Volumes: Vol. 1: God, Self, and Family. 215 pp. $19.95. (9780827612648); Vol. 2: The Jewish Community
and Beyond. 253 pp. $19.95. (9780827613560).

The study of Talmud and its application to contemporary life has become more widespread over
the past few years. In this two-volume set, Rabbi Amy Scheinerman provides a useful demonstration
of how the text can be analyzed and used in contemporary society.

Each volume contains seven sections, each relating to a different aspect of our daily lives and our
communities. Volume 1 covers such topics as “Controlling our Anger,” “Approaching Prayer,” and
“Affirming our Sexuality.” Volume 2 includes “Creating Consensus in Community” and “Caring for
Poor People.” Every section discusses its subject using a passage from the Bavli Gemara (Babylonian
Talmud). The sections are divided into several parts: “Why study this passage?” “A broad view to
begin,” which analyzes the topic using Talmudic, Biblical and modern techniques; and “Continuing
the Conversation,” a series of questions for readers and students to consider.

This is a worthy and thoughtful approach to Talmud study and its broader applications. Rabbi
Scheinerman’s questions are deep and the discussions offered are both incisive and complex. As such,
this work will be of greatest interest and value to experienced groups of readers; for an introduction
to the subject, Rabbi Judith Abrams’ books are more appropriate. This book may also be of interest to
clergy and academics in a variety of fields. Recommended for all libraries.

Fred Isaac, Temple Sinai, Oakland, CA

Schüle, Annegret and Tobias Sowade, Between Persecution and Participation: Biography of a
Bookkeeper at J.A. Topf & Söhne. Trans. by Penny Milbouer (Modern Jewish History). Syracuse:

Annegret Schüle, curator of a memorial about the firm who built the Auschwitz crematoria, wrote
this book about Tobias Sowade about a “crushingly ordinary man” who worked for the company
during the war years. The subject of the book, Willy Wiemokli, had a Jewish father who was killed in
Auschwitz, and so the writers grapple with the various emotions Willy might have felt while he was
working for the company that collaborated so closely with his father’s killers. The emphasis on Willy’s
alleged emotions throughout the book seemed a bit stretched, as if the authors themselves were trying
to find answers to questions that bothered them about him. The layout was at times confusing, with
an occasional spread of image and explanatory text interrupting the flow of the book. Overall, Between
Persecution and Participation is a specific World War II biography with Holocaust overtones that may
have some relevance to Holocaust or broader World War II collections.

Michelle Chesner, Columbia University, New York, NY

Schwartz, Daniel (ed). Spinoza’s Challenge to Jewish Thought: Writings on His Life, Philosophy and

Spinoza’s Challenge to Jewish Thought is a stimulating anthology which explores “two central
ambiguities—the ambiguity of Spinoza and Spinozism and the ambiguity of Jewishness in the modern
world.” An unusual aspect of the collection is its emphasis on how Spinoza’s life and work have been
received rather than on the philosopher’s own text. In his introduction, Schwartz argues emphatically
that Spinoza had a critical impact upon the writers and on the literature that emerged in his wake. There are 34 excerpts in the collection, some appearing in English translation for the first time. They include fiction, poetry, drama, and the writ of excommunication in addition to responsa and philosophical and historical essays. The responses range from those who consider that Spinoza expounded a Jewish philosophy to those who cannot reconcile his philosophy with Judaism. At one end of the spectrum he was a precursor of Jewish modernity, while others see his legacy “as toxic for Jews and Judaism.” There are several articles by Moses Mendelsohn examining Spinoza’s philosophy and its impact on Jewish law. Schwartz also includes passages from the autobiography of Solomon Maimon in order to demonstrate that Spinoza’s challenges to traditional Jewish culture were similarly evident in the writings of some of his contemporaries. A number of writers saw in the philosopher’s thought a pathway towards Zionism. Finally, the selections of poetry and drama give the reader some sense of the extent to which Spinoza’s revolutionary philosophy infused all aspects of Jewish thought. Schwartz’s introduction provides an excellent framework for this anthology which would be a valuable addition to any collection concerned with Jewish intellectual history and modern Jewish thought.

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante


*Jerusalem and Washington* is presented as a memoir, in an autobiographical format, of an Israeli politician and diplomat who served twice as Israeli ambassador to the United States (1990-1993, 1998-2000). But this work is much more. The reader will find candid discussions of how diplomacy is carried out with intimate details of Israeli domestic politics. Ambassador Shoval actively served in the Israeli Foreign Ministry from 1955 to 1957 and actively supported David Ben Gurion with the founding of the Rafi political party in 1965 and then the merged State List the same year. By 1973, the author became a MK in the newly formed Likud Party. The story covers the Arab-Israeli peace efforts from the Madrid Peace Conference through the Wye River Conference and Camp David.

This is an important and essential read for an appreciation of the critical developments in Israeli diplomatic history from early in 1970 up through 2003.

Sanford R. Silverburg, Catawba College, Salisbury, NC


This interesting biography of a Jewish radical, activist librarian written by a third-generation librarian documents the life of Ruth Rappaport, a long-time employee of the Library of Congress who retired in 1993 and died in 2010. She escaped from Nazi Germany as a teenager, lived in Israel during the 1948 war, and worked as a military librarian in Japan and Vietnam during the 1960s. The book is divided into the nine main periods of Ruth’s life, starting in Leipzig (1923-1938) and ending in Washington, DC (1993-2010). It is based on extensive research using archival and personal collections, author correspondence/interviews, oral histories and interviews, videos, websites, all listed in the bibliography, along with notes for each chapter. Numerous quotes from Ruth provide a glimpse into her personality and character, as well as a prologue and epilogue.

The author is currently an archivist at the Arizona Historical Society and previously worked at the Library of Congress and the U.S. Senate. A special feature of the book is the author’s own experiences, thoughts and ideas in the process of writing the biography included as part of the text. Overall, a fascinating portrait of a remarkable librarian, recommended for academic, public, and special Judaica libraries.

Susan Freiband, retired library educator, volunteer temple librarian, Alexandria, VA

This is a concise history of the Irgun Zwai Leumi, one of the underground groups that fought the British to establish a Jewish state in the Land of Israel. The work mainly deals with the actions of the Irgun while the ideological and psychological aspects, though not totally ignored, receive much less attention. For example, van Tonder deals with the incidents involving the Irgun ship Altalena that almost led to civil war, but he does not explore its ramifications or try to discern blame. Similarly, he does not discuss at any length the context and ramifications of the Irgun’s attack on the King David Hotel. In other words, the book is much stronger in description than analysis. The details are clear and, for the most part, accurate. One faulty detail, however, is the discrepancy between the timeline at the beginning of the book which states that Labor Zionist politician Chaim Arlosoroff was assassinated by Revisionist Zionists while in the text of the book the culprits remain disputed. Thus, while van Tonder’s book serves as a useful overview, the one essential English-language book on the Irgun is still *Terror Out of Zion* by J. Bowyer Bell. Bell provides a full account of the Irgun and its breakaway group, Lehi, and he also offers sophisticated analysis of them.

Shmuel Ben-Gad. Gelman Library, George Washington University


The *Sefer Yesirah* is generally thought to be one of the earliest texts of Kabbalistic literature, but as Tzahi Weiss demonstrates, we may be reading it anachronistically through the lens of later mystical texts. As Dr. Weiss jokes in the introduction, “We know almost everything about this book except four minor issues. Who wrote it? Where and when was it written? What does it mean? And what was the original version?” This book makes the case that the *Sefer Yesirah* is not a product of the rabbinic world but was written by 7th century Jews influenced by Syriac Christianity. Aside from its narrow focus on this important text, this work broadens our ideas of how we define Jewish mysticism and Judaism as a whole outside of the accepted canon. Recommended for academic libraries.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University


This intriguing book contrasts the assimilated Jewish communities in three major European capitals during the 19th and 20th centuries. As secularization led to erosion of physical boundaries, the Jews, no longer confined to the shtetl or ghetto, found the freedom of wide-open spaces that allowed for alternate religious expressions. Examined are the dynamics and experiences among each city — largely acculturated Parisian Jewry; the Jews of pre-Hitler Berlin, where tensions arose with the influx of their more provincial East European brethren, the Ostjuden; and the Russian Jews in St. Petersburg (Leningrad), where they straddled two worlds being considered an ethnic rather than religious group (those allowed to live there were already assimilated, yet tried to retain some of their heritage, at least until Stalin). The dichotomy — being a citizen on the street but a Jew at home — reflected waning Torah observance, and a crisis of authority, while individualism bred alienation and decline of marriage and traditional structures. New buildings — some magnificent, like the Choral Synagogue in St. Petersburg — offered, instead of prayer and ritual, spaces for lavish weddings, bar mitzvahs, or fundraisers, glamorous but devoid of Jewish meaning. Cafés and theaters became far more popular meeting places for the young and restless. The book ends somewhat tragically with the aftermath of the Holocaust and Communism, and the cultural ambiguity, and possibly failure, of new or recreated spaces. One bright note: the author
warmly credits Chabad for utilizing public space—hotels, auditoriums, and shuls—to bring Jews not only together but back to their roots. Well researched, this book hints at the unintended consequences of a society without borders. Recommended for academic libraries.

Hallie Cantor, Yeshiva University, New York, NY


This book, part of the eight-volume series “Talmudic Marital Dramas,” examines two brief Aggadic tales (BT Menachot 44a and Avodah Zarah 17a) in great depth. Given the strong halakhic prohibitions on prostitution and the general perspective of the Talmud as a work written by men for men, it might come as a surprise to see female prostitutes as the protagonists of these stories. These brief stories are analyzed from a dizzying number of perspectives, ancient and modern, religious and secular, academic and popular. One jarring aspect of the work is the author’s insistence on purposefully using pejorative (and some amusingly dated) terms for sex workers “in order to reflect the negative value perspective of the Talmudic narrators.” Overall, a thoughtful and valuable work.

Daniel Scheide, Florida Atlantic University

Elsa Stehlen, an eighty-year-old German Jewish immigrant, has just buried her husband. When she learns that the inheritance she had expected has been stolen by her Bernie Madoff-like financial advisor, she must figure out how to make ends meet. An unexpected mugging leaves her with major medical bills. This drives her to a desperate solution and brings her unexpected notoriety. This entertaining tale of a senior citizen’s discovery of new strengths and talents is both touching and humorous. Watching Elsa transform from dutiful wife to strong widow will inspire readers. Following the parallel plot about Elsa’s college professor son coping with his own financial issues provides further proof that money or the lack thereof leads people down tangled paths. Readers will enjoy the story, which is both touching and thought-provoking, especially in this era of diminishing aid for those in need. It is an excellent choice for book clubs.

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


Annette Zinn had heard the Jewish mystical theory that a soul needs three days to process the fact that its body had died, but she is still surprised to find herself hovering over her own dead body at the age of 95.

For each of the next three days, Annette floats through not only her own memories, but through those of her close friends. Annette Zinn had been collector of antiques and of broken-hearted people. Although she knew her friends had experienced hardships, she hadn’t known the details of what happened. Now after her death, she sees the terrible beating her dear gay friend Henry had endured as a younger man. She sees the early life of artist Sarah Sax (who becomes Sarah Steinway of Carter’s previous novel) and the tragic death by murder/suicide of Sarah’s parents.

Annette relives the many kind gestures of...
her husband and the sweet fun times they had together. She also remembers small moments like the kindness of a neighbor who had supported her when her father remarried.

When someone dies, we say “May her memory be a blessing.” In this novel, Annette gets to relive in the days after her death the times other people have blessed her and how the memory of her friendship will be a blessing to her friends.

Recommended for synagogue libraries.

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


*Bombay Brides* is set in the Jewish community of Ahmedabad, India, specifically, the residents of the Shalom India Housing Society. The Jewish community in Ahmedabad is very small and close-knit, and when it comes to the Shalom India Housing Society, they are very involved in each other’s lives. Most of the residents are permanent and we learn a bit about them, but this book focuses on Apt A-107 which gets rented out to a series of occupants. In each chapter, we get a short story focusing on a different resident. We learn about how they are finding love, navigating relationships, celebrating holidays, and finding themselves.

This is a fascinating look at the everyday lives of Jews in India. Highly recommended.

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


Feldheim has released a new volume with two previously published stories that relate to each other. In *The Twins* (originally published in 1982), the Glick family is torn apart by the Holocaust. First, they are shunted to the crowded ghetto, where Yudel continues his Talmud studies and Esther secretly teaches the girls of the community. Their twins, Chaim and Brachah, are strikingly similar, and they strive to protect them, often separating them to avoid attention. Soon there is a selection, and girls are picked for transport. Esther joins them, and on the train, she hands out cyanide and takes a pill herself. At this point Brachah is given to a non-Jewish woman, who delivers her to a convent. Yudel joins the partisans in the forest, taking Chaim with him. Soon Yudel is killed in an operation, and the orphaned twins’ paths diverge. Chaim stays with the partisans, and after the war, makes his way to Israel. Brachah has been indoctrinated in the Catholic Church, is eventually baptized, and is sent to Israel as a missionary to convert Jews. By chance meetings, the siblings are eventually reunited, and Brachah returns to Judaism.

*The Long Journey Home* (originally published in 1984) follows Shlomo Sharfson, once a diligent student of Talmud, but dealing with doubts as the First World War brings new ideas to his community. He is drawn to Zionism, and soon the youth group selects Zissel, a secular young woman, and Shlomo, to go to Palestine. But once there, he is disenchanted with the non-religious and socialist lifestyle. Zissel, whose family considers themselves as Poles, is called home when her father is murdered by anti-Semites. In the meantime, Shlomo leaves Palestine for the Soviet Union to experience “true” communism. He doesn’t fit in there, either, and is soon sent to a labor camp as punishment for not working on the Sabbath. Zissel remains in Poland and becomes close to Shlomo’s family. Soon the Nazis arrive and force the Jews into a ghetto. Zissel helps get Shlomo’s sister out of the ghetto and placed in a convent. Zissel and her mother are also able to escape, but Shlomo’s family is deported to Auschwitz (his brother David jumps off the train and survives). After the Germans surrender, many Jews go to Krakow looking for family, and Shlomo eventually reunites with David and Zissel. Zissel and Shlomo are married, and they all go to Palestine. Chaim Glick and Shlomo become study partners. After Chaim reunites with his sister, they learn that Shlomo’s sister was in the same convent, but now
Sarah is Silvana, and they must find her. Brachah goes to France and brings her back to Israel.

Although the narration is at times didactic (extolling the virtues of pious Jews and harshly critical of secularism and the kibbutz movement) and many of the characters are one dimensional, the stories are compelling and describe a variety of experiences during the Holocaust. While best suited to Orthodox readers, it is also a good choice for libraries that collect Holocaust fiction.

Chava Pinchuck, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Miriam Gil’s life is getting out of control. Her father’s new girlfriend is moving in and he is kicking Miriam out. She decides to go to Israel for a year to study abroad in Haifa University after receiving a full scholarship, much to the chagrin of her ex-pat Israeli father. She arrives in the fall of 1992, and immediately feels like an outsider. She chooses to live with Israelis but doesn’t realize the political ramifications of her actions. She befriends a Druze girl, and has a contentious relationship with a Palestinian girl.

While in Israel, Miriam is on a quest to find out her father’s history and begins to spend time with her Uncle Moshe and his wife Leah. Through a series of events, Miriam ends up in a political bind related to her Aunt Leah and her father’s sordid past. Through a tragic accident, Miriam realizes why her father is the way he is, and she comes to terms with her past as well.

Although many parts of the story are a little confusing, Passport Control is a welcome addition to any Judaica collections, although not an academic one.

Laura Schutzman, AJL Publications Chair, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY


My Name is Hanna by Tara Lynn Masih reads like a Holocaust memoir, but it is a work of historical fiction. It tells the story of Hanna, who changes her name after the war, and her family’s 1941 escape from the Nazis in Ukraine, and the harrowing tale of their survival and rescue. Thanks to the kindness of strangers, the family’s quest to survive includes a stay in secluded cabins, and an intricate maze of caves.

Told as an elderly adult to her daughter, the close calls and near starvation that the family endured have led Hanna to hide her past from her family. She finally decides that as her life is ending, it is time for her tale to come to light.

The fact that this book reads like a memoir may concern many librarians, in terms of authenticity. However, by identifying the work as historical fiction, the inaccuracies can just be written off as literary license.

Highly recommended for public and private institutions, but not appropriate for academic ones.

Laura Schutzman, AJL Publications Chair, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY


Nathan and the Lions of Łódź told the story, in novel format, of a group of 34 teenagers who lived in the Polish forest of Las Lagienwnicki as partisans during World War II. This follow-up story, The Saga of Nathan, focuses on Nathan Kochinski, a member of the group, and his adventures in the post-World War II period. Like the other survivors, Nathan leaves Poland for Palestine. His war-time experience as a combat leader is recognized and when he joins the Haganah he rises to the rank of captain. His transformative role in this underground movement leads him to become a liaison officer seconded to David Ben-Gurion, director of the Jewish Agency for Security Policy. After the establishment of the State of Israel, Nathan continues to offer his expertise, rising to the level of Deputy Minister in the Ministry
Reviews of Literature for Adults


The Neversink is a hotel in the Catskills run by three generations of the Jewish immigrant Sikorsky family. While the hotel flourished for many years, two things have eaten into its success. The first is simply the convergence of changing times and tastes coupled with an aging building. The second, darker reason is that a boy disappeared from the hotel grounds and other children have disappeared from the area.

The story is told through a series of narratives from different family members’ or hotel workers’ points of view. It begins in 1950 with the first child’s disappearance. The story skips forward one to eight years as each person tells their own experience at the hotel. One family member in particular, Alice, the great niece of one of the original owners, is driven to solve the mystery of missing children even knowing it may tarnish what is left of the Neversink Hotel’s reputation.

Part cultural history of the Catskills, part family drama, and part mystery, this book is recommended for most literature collections.

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


Set during the time of the destruction of the Berlin Wall, Secrets and Shadows by Roberta Silman is the story of Paul Bertram and his ex-wife Eva’s journey to discover what remained of his childhood home in Berlin. A hidden Berliner during the Holocaust, Paul and his family survived by the generosity of colleagues and strangers, and eventually made their way to the United States, where Paul and his family changed their name from Berger, in an attempt to create a new life. Paul attempts to put his past behind him but is never successful until his trip with Eva in 1989.

Over the course of a week, Paul deconstructs his past and begins to understand why he is the way he is in light of his survival story. It is a tale of intrigue, betrayal, and renewal that would be appropriate for any library with a Jewish collection.

Laura Schutzman, AJL Publications Chair, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY

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.

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Among the many strengths of this novel is its respect for its readers’ intelligence. As thirteen-year-old Sophie prepares, with doubts and trepidation, for her Bat Mitzvah, she records her thoughts in a journal that marks her as one of the brightest and most appealing protagonists to come along in a long time. Sophie is nobody’s fool and her sardonic outlook on life finds her critical of many of the assaults our consumer society makes on girls her age: being pretty, being popular, wearing the right clothes, having the right friends, thinking like everyone else, accepting the mass media’s conformity-producing pieties and simplistic absurdities. Sophie’s older sister, Libby, who is suffering from cerebral palsy, is the focus of her life. The novel is told in two voices, Sophie’s and Libby’s, with Libby writing a book for Sophie via assistive technology as she is unable to talk. The book, a fantasy set in medieval times about the friendship between a girl and a hawk, is Libby’s way of saying goodbye. As Sophie’s Bat Mitzvah approaches, Libby’s life ebbs away. With all but the final chapter of the story written, Sophie finishes it, the voices of the two sisters coming together in a sad but satisfying conclusion. Libraries serving middle grade readers are urged not to pass up this unusually genuine story!

Linda Silver, retired librarian, author of *The Jewish Values Finder* and *Best Jewish Books for Children and Teens*; Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee; past co-editor, with Anne Dublin, of the AJL Newsletter’s children and teens book reviews


In her Artist’s Note for this fancifully and beautifully illustrated picture book on the six days of Creation and Shabbat, Ellen Kahan Zager states, “We understand that God created the world with words. The pictures in this book are also created with words. Because Hebrew is the language of the Torah, these images are in Hebrew.” Each day’s description in rhyme – “Day One: The world began when God said “light,” / And changed the world from dark to bright. / Dark in the night and light in the day, / Our beautiful world was underway. / And there was evening and there was morning, a single day.” – is accompanied by a double-page illustration of the day’s activity. The pictures incorporate Hebrew from the simple yet evocative repetition of the word “מים” (*mayim*, water) to depict waves and ripples in the waters below of Day Two to the detailed drawings of plants and animals of Days Three, Five, and Six. The bountiful fruit hanging from the date palm tree is composed of the word “תמר” (*tamar*, date) repeated in micrographic form. A polar bear’s body consists of the letters of “וד קוטב” (*dov kotev*), with the tet (ט) forming the head, the vet (ב) providing the ears. The more than fifty individual illustrations, including the Hebrew, English,
and transliteration for each word, are listed at the end. A wonderful read-aloud for the preschool and primary ages, it can also be used creatively with older children with a knowledge of Hebrew.

Marcie Eskin, Beth Hillel Bnai Emunah, Wilmette, IL


The Key from Spain is much more than a picture book biography of a world-famous Sephardic musician, singer, and composer. This book reflects the story of Spanish Jews, expelled from Spain in 1492, who made their way to whatever safe haven they could find. In Flory Jagoda’s case, her family (the Altaras family) travelled first to Turkey and eventually to Bosnia, where they settled in the village of Vlasenica. With them, they carried two precious possessions: “One was very little: a key. The other was very big, yet took up no space at all: Ladino.” The Altaras family played and sang at all village celebrations. “Songs filled the sky. Music filled Flory’s heart.” In 1934, Flory and her parents left their village and went to Zagreb, Croatia. They then fled to Split, where they managed to survive the war. After the war, they learned that forty-two members of the Altaras family had been killed in the Holocaust. In 1946, Flory married Henry Jagoda and moved to the United States. She carried with her three precious possessions: her accordion, the language of Ladino, and her music.

In clear, expressive, age-appropriate prose, the author has conveyed this story—both its background and its present significance. The lively multimedia illustrations (acrylics, pastels, colored pencils, and collage) are stunning, with vibrant colors and varying perspectives. An author’s note illuminates more about Flory Jagoda and her music, as does a QR code that connects to Flory singing “Ocho Kandelikas,” her well-known Hanukkah song.

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


As the subtitle suggests, this is much more than a discussion of Janusz Korczak’s life. He was born in Warsaw to an assimilated Jewish family and was named at birth Henryk Goldszmit. The first section of the book, called “The Old Doctor,” covers Korczak’s early years, his renown in Poland as a doctor and advocate for children, his work at Dom Sierot, the Jewish children’s home, and his valiant struggles to protect the children as anti-Semitism grew ever stronger and the Nazi threat to Poland grew more imminent. The next section, “The Hater,” covers the rise of Hitler with emphasis on his murderous ideology of Jew hatred, how he was able to inculcate an entire nation, including its children, into those beliefs, and a gruesome summary of the forms they took, such as euthanasia. The remainder of this well-researched, thoroughly documented book is devoted to the Holocaust in Poland, with emphasis on the Warsaw Ghetto and to what is called “Korczak’s last walk” with the almost 200 Jewish children
in his care to the train that would take them all to their deaths in Treblinka. A final section, “The Reckoning,” discusses the aftermath of the Holocaust, including the fates of prominent Nazis who survived the war, its lingering effects on German children, contemporary Arab anti-Semitism, and the rights of children in an age of terrorism. Marrin is a prize-winning author who makes no effort to hide the hideous nature of the Holocaust or to try to extract some vestiges of hope from it, as do too many books on the subject aimed at young people. (The advance review copy on which this review is based was lacking some photographs, picture credits, and an index.)

Linda Silver, retired librarian, author of The Jewish Values Finder and Best Jewish Books for Children and Teens; Past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee; past co-editor, with Anne Dublin, of the AJL Newsletter's children and teens book reviews

BIBLE STORIES AND MIDRASH


Reissued with new illustrations, the Bible stories are simply told as is appropriate for a “My First – Shared Reading” book: “David took care of sheep. He loved God.” “So Esther got ready. And she went to see the king.” The very colorful, highly cartoonish illustrations support each story nicely. However, while this series would be a great addition to an Early Reader collection, it is important to note that it is a derivative of The Beginner’s Bible storybook published by Zondervan, a Christian publishing company.

God Makes the World, originally published in 2005, is a charming retelling of the story of Creation, however, the concept of “sin” is introduced after Adam and Eve eat the fruit, and the book ends with “One day, God would send Jesus. Jesus would save everyone from their sins.” David and the Giant, originally published in 2008, is a short, sweet retelling of this well-known story, and would easily fit in a Jewish collection. In Queen Esther Saves Her People, originally published in 2018, Mordecai is drawn wearing a tallit that looks more like a small woolen winter scarf draped around his neck. No head covering is apparent on Mordecai. Esther’s clothes are all sleeveless, and she also has no head covering. While the story is charmingly told, it may not be appropriate for every Jewish library. There are other books in this series which have not been reviewed: Moses and the King, Joseph and His Brothers, and Jonah and the Big Fish. Before considering them for a Jewish collection, read them carefully for Christian influences.

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


Have you ever wondered how to prevent your umbrella from being stolen? Or how to exterminate a mosquito? This light-hearted picture book biography of Rube Goldberg (1883–1970), award-winning cartoonist and creator of useless inventions, may offer a solution. Using lively text, Aronson tells the story of Rube Goldberg who, from the time he was a boy, loved to draw. He dreamed of one day becoming a cartoonist for a big-time newspaper, but because his father objected, Rube studied engineering and ended up working in San Francisco. Rube eventually decided to follow his dream and go to New York City. There, he finally got a job as a cartoonist for the New York Evening Mail.

For decades, Rube described (and lampooned) events of his day, including sports and politics. He also developed an alter ego, Professor Lucifer Gorgonzola Butts, who invented one intricate machine after the other—all of them pretty much ridiculous and impractical. This biography ends with a serious note: “Figure out what you want. Work as hard as you can. And most of all, have a great time getting there.”

Neubecker’s illustrations give us a modern update of Rube’s intricate and zany illustrations. They’re filled with whimsical, imaginative details that a child (or adult) will want to return to again and again. The colorful palette almost makes the images spring off the page. The design and layout also enhance the book, with various perspectives and points of view. The inside covers contain a few of Rube’s original cartoons, adding to the authenticity of this stunning biography. There is only one reference (in the back matter) to Rube Goldberg’s Jewish background, which also includes further biographical information and bibliographical references.

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


In Białystok in 1860s Russian Poland, young Ludwik Leyzor (L. L.) Zamenhof becomes frustrated with the many languages spoken—Russian, Polish, German, Yiddish—and how people cannot understand each other. He decides to create his own language so everyone can get along. He borrows words from established languages, but he also wonders how he can develop a new word for every existing word in a simple way. Shop signs give him the inspiration he needs: suffixes. He shares his new language with his friends. His father, however, insists he go to Moscow to university. When Leyzor returns home, he finds his father has destroyed all his work. Leyzor creates his language, Esperanto, all over again. The story culminates with the First World Congress on Esperanto in Paris. Leyzor speaks in his new language and the audience understands.

Rockliff simply and superbly tells a complex and true story of Zamenhof (1859-1917), the Jewish creator of Esperanto, a universal language that even today has about two million speakers. Dzierżawska’s colorful illustrations aid in simplifying that story to show the development of Esperanto. For example, one page shows the root word for flower, “floro,” the plural “floraro,” and a vase “florujo.” The narrative demonstrates the power of persistence in tikkun olam, repairing the world. In the back matter, Rockliff explains that Zamenhof’s two daughters and a son perish in the Holocaust. There is also an explanation of Esperanto with websites and an invitation to readers to create their own languages as well as a selected bibliography. Zamenhof’s Jewish heritage is evident, especially in the back matter, but is not made central to the story.

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

This biography for the earliest readers examines the life of Ruth Bader Ginsburg in an age-appropriate way that will help children develop word recognition and reading skills. The only Jewish content is the fact that Ruth Bader Ginsburg is Jewish. Simple, short sentences and familiar words detail her life. Written in first-person voice, Ginsburg’s life is condensed to nine important concepts: when and where she was born; her parents, who worked hard and valued education; her days as a law student and marrying a law student; how the men in her class thought they were better students; never giving up and becoming best in her class; working to achieve equal treatment and equal pay for everyone; her appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court; and helping make gay marriage legal. These important ideas each appear on single pages, while on facing pages, separate photos illustrate intriguing questions for the young reader, such as, “How do you help people?” “Why are people treated differently?” “What choices do you make?” The back matter includes a timeline, a short glossary, and index.

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

**BOARD BOOKS**


The historical origins of Hanukkah are emphasized as the author describes how the Maccabees defended their religion along with Jerusalem and the Temple against the mighty Greek armies of King Antiochus. Hebrew terms such as “Maccabee” and “Ner Tamid” are clearly explained within the context of the book, making it accessible to those without extensive Jewish background. The final two pages illustrate the customs of lighting candles, eating latkes and jelly donuts, and playing dreidel with very simple, concise explanations.

Jill Weber’s illustrations place the settings in warm, rich colors and present expressive characters which highlight both the seriousness and excitement of the Hanukkah story. This is an excellent introduction to Hanukkah for very young children with the emphasis on the appropriate values and history instead of just the food and presents. An earlier picture book version with the same title was published in 2011 aimed at older readers. It includes greater historical details and explanations, a latke recipe, instructions for playing dreidel, and most of the same pictures.

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


This retelling of the well-known biblical story of David and Goliath, written by the staff of Running Press Kids, is adapted for very young children. The story is told in short, simple sentences, with touches of dialogue here and there. The artist has used bright primary colors, although all the characters seem to have their eyes closed. The layout here is rather confusing. Double-page spreads are effective; single-page spreads are disjointed. For a more artistic and appealing version of this story, see Jean Marzollo’s *David & Goliath* (Little Brown, 2004).

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

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Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

FICTION - MIDDLE GRADE


Seventh-grader Ari Rosensweig’s family has recently moved to California from New York, a transition made tumultuous by factors including serious conflict between his parents. Ari himself struggles with his weight and self-image, even engaging in self-harm, and a diet encouraged by his mother plays a major role in the story. In all this difficulty, the Rosensweigs have become distanced from Jewish ritual, but Ari starts Bar Mitzvah preparations as the story begins. Jewish content is woven in naturally. On the negative side for Ari, anti-Semitic taunts accompany bullying about his weight, but on the positive side, his bar mitzvah study reflects and encourages his taking ownership of his emotional development. Not a light read, despite the accessibility of the verse in which it’s written, but a thoughtful and affecting one.

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


Miguel grows up Catholic in Tucson in Arizona territory on his family’s horse farm. In 1872 he is about to celebrate his 13th birthday, when his parents reveal their secret: they are Conversos of Jewish heritage. His older brothers know, but do not tell. Miguel is used to special meals every Friday evening, peddlers and immigrants visiting, but not their Hebrew fluency -- allowing them to read the secret family diary. Angry about his new identity which conflicts with his goal of becoming a priest, he rides away from home. Fleeing into the desert he gets lost, gets captured by dangerous Apaches, then saved by Rushing Cloud, a friendly local Native American from one of several Territory tribes whose children are forced into mission schools to learn English to promote a bid for statehood. Rushing Cloud is running away from school to preserve his culture. He initiates Miguel into desert survival techniques until the cavalry seeking Miguel makes it necessary for Rushing Cloud to flee. Back home, Miguel apologizes for his hasty, hostile behavior; he reflects on his experiences -- that all groups have both good and bad, and that heritage and identity are important.

It was rough living in America’s only fortified walled city, keeping out raiding Apaches, Mexican bandits and armed outlaws. When the tale opens, Arizona has been part of the US for less than 20 years; all natives and Mexicans, including Miguel’s family, became Americans by Presidential signature. Very few Jews lived in the Southwest; they sought each other out, bonded against anti-Semitism. This well plotted historical fiction incorporates icons of the American West: Native Americans, Cavalry, horse traders, dusty main streets, itinerant peddlers, and the social status of priests and a town wise man known as “doc.” It holds tension through hints of Jewish practices and foreshadowing. The Apache capture is exciting. Meeting an introspective Indian boy fighting the mission system of assimilation provides philosophical outlook on group and personal identity perfect for the targeted reading group. Underlying all are tolerance, family ties and valued friendship.

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


Eleven-year-old Anya lives in the small village of Zmeyreka in the country of Kievan Rus’ with her mother, grandmother, and grandfather in an undetermined medieval-type time. (Her father is absent, conscripted to fight for the tsar against the forces of Sultan Suleiman.) Complications abound. Anya and her family are the only Jews in the village. The anti-Semitic magistrate declares that the family owes
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Anya and the Dragon

Anya has no choice but to ally herself with Yedsha, the tsar’s fool and dragon hunter, who will pay her to find the last dragon of Kieven Rus’. Meanwhile, two strangers with differing motives arrive in the village. Sigurd, the Varangian villain, intends to slay the dragon while Dobrynya Nikitich, the tsar’s trusted knight and protector of the people, wants to take the dragon back alive to the tsar. Anya makes friends with Ivan, Yedsha’s youngest son, and with the friendly, talking dragon called Håkon who saves her life. She has a serious dilemma: save her family or save Håkon. How Anya finds a solution through courage and friendship is at the crux of the plot, for “heroes do what they need to do, even if they’re afraid.”

*Anya and the Dragon* is filled with numerous folklore motifs: friendship, family, transformation, remarkably strong men, making wise choices, magical weapons. Mythical creatures are plentiful, for example, a *domovoi* (house spirit), a *bukavac* (a six-legged monster), and *rusalki* (female water spirits). Jewish components weave in and out of the plot – holidays, Shabbat, concepts like the *ibbur* (positive possession) and *mitzvot* (good deeds), Torah, Talmud, the Messiah, and even Anya’s impending *bat mitzvah*. Added to this confusing mix, the author often uses modern slang like “No way” and “I guess.” Without any help of a glossary or a list of the characters’ difficult names, a young reader will probably feel rather overwhelmed unless they are a passionate fan of folklore or fantasy. That being said, engaging sparks of humor, characterization, and fast-paced action are scattered throughout the novel. Stay tuned for Book Two.

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


The Five Star Detectives (a family of five children) work hard at analyzing clues, interviewing witnesses, and decoding messages in order to solve neighborhood mysteries. Eleven-year-old Shimmy Stern organizes his spunky siblings: artsy ten-year-old Adina, precocious eight-year-old Yitzy, seven-year-old Nosson, who is always hungry, and adorable four-year-old Miri, into a determined team who love adventure, fun, and helping others. Neighbor Mrs. Rabinovitz, as is her holiday tradition, sets up eight menorahs two weeks before Chanukah when she will light a different one each night. Each menorah has special meaning – six belonged to her now adult children when they were young, one was a gift from her parents for her wedding, and one is from Israel. She loves seeing the menorahs and feeling the warm memories of family traditions. But then some of the candles go missing, and Mrs. Rabinovitz turns to the Stern gang for help. They investigate carefully and seriously using methods they have studied and read about – decoding messages, dusting for fingerprints, questioning possible suspects, and eventually solve the mystery with lots of humor and sensitivity.

The story is fun and amusing and focuses on teamwork, determination, and tradition. At the end of the story, the Stern siblings and their friends create a special and beautiful Chanukah celebration for Mrs. Rabinovitz. There is a subtle emphasis on the positive Jewish values of helping others, honesty, and caring which are evident in the actions and expressions of the characters. The language is simple and descriptive, and the reader becomes part of the Stern family as they experience challenges in their daily lives while working on their case. While this series is targeted to Orthodox readers, Ellen Roteman’s combination of a fun story with a favorite holiday will appeal to everyone.

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


In the months following 9/11, Shirli’s junior high school produces *Fiddler on the Roof*. A search for props in her Zayde’s attic brings up questions about her family’s past; Zayde’s mother went through
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similar events to those portrayed in *Fiddler*, and Zayde himself is a Holocaust survivor. He is so reluctant to talk or think about those memories that he avoids all music because of the associations they hold for him from that time; his violin sits untouched in the attic. Shirli’s work on the play gradually brings up opportunities, some more welcome than others, for Zayde to face his difficult past as each becomes aware of the other’s musical talent. Zayde, meanwhile, is becoming less independent as he ages, and a friendship with Amir, who helps Zayde after he falls outside Amir’s grocery store, brings forth contemporary issues of intolerance and their parallels with anti-Semitism. Amir’s store was vandalized after 9/11 by people who assumed incorrectly that he was a Muslim. “Amir is Hindu. But even if he were a Muslim, that does not make him a terrorist. Those people with the spray cans, they are the terrorists. It makes you think of Nazi Germany.”

The *Fiddler on the Roof* production provides both some lighter material (questions of casting; a budding relationship with the boy who plays Tevye to Shirli’s Golde), as well as an accessible entry point to the serious issues at the heart of the story. Information about several painful periods in history is gently delivered and clearly explained, making this earnest but honest novel a good choice for readers who are new to some of the subject matter.

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


On the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the early 1900s, third-grader Rachel Berger is tired of her little sister Hannah always wanting to go places with her. Her mother suddenly quits her much-needed job to strike out on her own as a dressmaker. She knows her mother will probably want to dress her and Hannah alike for Rosh Hashanah. Wanting to differentiate herself, she finds beautiful rose buttons at Mr. Solomon’s shop. One problem: She doesn’t have enough money to pay for them. She makes herself useful at the drugstore fetching people for whom telephone calls come and earns enough. But she decides to give the buttons to her mother for an important client.

This illustrated chapter book narrative’s tone and content recall *All-of-a-Kind Family*, as well as *The Doll Shop Downstairs* by Yona Zeldis McDonough (Viking Books for Young Readers, 2009). It evokes the feel of the tenement neighborhood, the closeness of its Jewish immigrant inhabitants as well as its challenges. A highlight is Rachel’s grandmother, who lives with the family, and naturally offers sage advice. One drawback is the formality of using “Mrs. Berger” instead of truly inhabiting Rachel as the point-of-view character and using “Mama.” This book could be used for classroom discussion about today’s immigrants and the challenges they face as well as at-home conversations about Jewish family history in America.

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

**FICTION - TEEN**

**Carlton, Susan Kaplan. In the Neighborhood of True. New York: Algonquin, 2019. 320 pp. $17.95. (9781616208608). Gr. 9-12.**

In the wake of her father’s death, seventeen-year-old Ruth Robb, her mom, and her sister move in with her non-Jewish grandparents in Atlanta, Georgia in the late 1950s. Ruth very quickly figures out that the pastel, debutante world she has moved into is not very welcoming to frizzy haired, black clothed, New York Jews, so she chooses to keep that bit a secret. Her mother doesn’t think Ruth should hide who she is, and an agreement is struck: Shabbat services at the local temple for every debutante activity Ruth wants to do. Ruth wholeheartedly immerses herself in the debutante society and very quickly gets “the” boy, Davis Jefferson. In contrast to that culture, the rabbi of the temple, and a college student named Max are staunch supporters of integration and civil rights making Ruth question her own behavior and that
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of her debutante friends. When her first night with Davis is interrupted in the early morning hours by his college age brother, Ruth senses that something is wrong. The following morning Ruth discovers that her temple has been the target of a horrible hate crime. In the ensuing days she must confront who she is, and what she believes in to decide whether to do what’s right or what’s easy.

Ruth is a complex character with whom readers will be able to identify. She wants to fit in, yet also wants to figure out her own identity. Her relationship with the handsome, charming Davis is both romantic and full of big, dramatic teenage firsts. Ruth’s family generally supports her, even if they don’t always agree with her choices. Refreshingly, this is a book set in a different time and place than is often seen in Jewish YA, though, unfortunately, still very timely for 2019. That said, the book could have used some expansion on what happened at the temple, as well as the fallout of the incident. The storytelling feels a bit rushed at the climax, leaving the reader wondering what hadn’t been told on the pages.

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


Michael Ausman is starting at a new school again. Two months into his junior year of high school he, an atheist, is starting at St. Clare’s, a Catholic school. While looking for fellow non-believers, Michael finds Lucy, a strong Catholic who believes that the Church should change and evolve with the times. Lucy introduces Michael to the band of St. Clare’s misfits who call themselves “Heretics Anonymous.” The “Heretics” include Avi, a quasi-observant Jew who is gay; Eden, a Celtic Reconstructionist Polytheist; and Max, a Unitarian with a penchant for wearing capes that break the school dress code. Once Michael joins the “Heretics” though, the group goes from venting about the injustices of the school to small acts of rebellion, including anonymously supplying the whole school with ugly ties and fake moustaches to poke holes in the dress code rules. Things are going well for Michael, he’s enjoying time with the “Heretics,” he’s dating Lucy, and school is going ok. That is, until his dad announces that they will once again be moving, this time overseas. In an act of reactionary rebellion, Michael goes rogue from the group and the consequences threaten to undo everything he had worked to build at St. Clare’s.

Avi, the Jewish member of the “Heretics” says, “I light candles on Chanukah. I eat my bodyweight in hamentaschen on Purim, and sat shiva when my grandma died,” as well as, “Even if you don’t keep kosher or even believe in God, you’re still Jewish and you still belong to this huge line of people who fought to survive, over and over so you could exist. I like being Jewish, but it’s not something I chose” which really covers the extent of the Jewish content of the book. Funny and heartwarming with great character development, this book is recommended for public and school libraries.

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


Teen angst, relationship building, gender identity, self-discovery, sexual tension, and a search for the meaning of Jewish identity fill this collection of short stories. Fifteen different authors (with a foreword by actress Mayim Bialik) present interesting and appropriate takes on growing up Jewish in twenty-first century America. The characters in these stories are male, female and gender fluid, gay, lesbian, and heterosexual, able-bodied and disabled teens in a variety of life situations. Falling in love at summer camp and while traveling in Israel, making new friends at a Zionists Youth convention and college freshman orientation, celebrating Shabbat, Hanukkah or the High Holy Days, these teens are encountering everything today’s young people face in navigating the art of growing up. Each story has a twist. For example, the International Space Station is in trouble, a world traveler sees dead people, an earthquake rocks a Shabbat dinner. Overall, however, everything works out in the end. Standouts
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include “The Hold” by David Levithan about gay first love between an Orthodox and nonreligious Jew; “Some Days You’re the Sidekick; Some Days You’re the Superhero” by Katherine Locke which uses a surprise twist to reconcile a friendship; and “Be Brave and All” by Laura Silverman which illustrates the benefits of standing up for what you believe.

Full disclosure: In several stories, teens are having gay, lesbian and heterosexual sex. There is nothing graphic in the telling, but it is very clear what is going on. They are drinking too much alcohol, smoking cigarettes and pot. None of these stories are for the younger reader or faint of heart, although teens reading them will not be surprised by the information contained. An excellent addition to any YA collection because of the depth and breadth of the stories being told.

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


Set in the Soviet Union amidst the turbulence of perestroika, and told by fifteen-year-old Sonya, this coming-of-age story suffers from clumsy writing and unconvincing characterization. Sonya has left Siberia, where she lived with her grandmother, to join her mother, a former persecuted dissident, and the mother’s alcoholic boyfriend in Moscow. Although she calls herself timid, Sonya quickly becomes a high school “hottie” after being chosen by sexy bad boy Ruslan to be his girlfriend. Not only is he sexually demanding, but Ruslan is also one of the many anti-Semites who pervade the story, complicating Sonya’s feelings because she is half-Jewish. Through her attraction to a Jewish classmate, the squeaky-clean, good boy opposite of Ruslan, Sonya explores what being Jewish means and tries to reconcile it with her attraction to a Jew hater. Sonya must also deal with her mother, who wants to emigrate to America as her relationship with her boyfriend becomes fraught with violent, obscenity-laden quarrels.

Judaism as one of the themes of the novel is viewed from the outside in, with not much more understanding of it than as a system of rules. The author’s attempt to weave simplistically presented concepts such as tikkun olam (repairing the world) and yetzer hara (evil inclination) into a melodrama about adolescent sexuality and politics does not provide clarity. Russian terminology will be mystifying to those unfamiliar with the language; parents are called “descendants” and characters are ordered to “shut your fountain.” In sum, the story is overwhelmed by a combination of excess plot and melodramatic style.

Linda Silver, retired librarian, author of The Jewish Values Finder and Best Jewish Books for Children and Teens; past Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, past co-editor, with Anne Dublin, of the AJL Newsletter’s children and teens book reviews


Best friends Sophie and Peter have been close their entire lives, enjoying an unusually insular relationship because Peter’s compromised health from kidney disease means that his world is limited to the four walls of his home. After they discover that she is a match for kidney donation, Sophie is sure that not only will Peter’s health improve, but their bond will increase, and her romantic feelings for him will be reciprocated. While Peter’s condition does improve after surgery, their relationship is instead tested by multiple outside forces. The biggest of those is Chase, Peter’s new bandmate and burgeoning love interest (Peter is bisexual). The once best friends must endeavor to understand what is important to them as individuals and what that means for their future together.

Author Rachel Lynn Solomon (You’ll Miss Me When I’m Gone) smartly depicts Peter’s journey of self as closely tied with his health; whereas he was once primarily focused on his illness, his improved condition means he is now able to explore his sexuality, interests, and faith. For example, Peter identifies as half-Jewish, and for the first time is able to experience Judaism and Jewish community by attending temple. Sophie, on the other hand, although frequently described as wearing a Star of David necklace,
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feels otherwise little connection to Judaism (perhaps because her parents, who met on a Birthright trip, are no longer religiously active). However, many of these questions about faith and identity are dropped by the last third of the novel to focus on the interpersonal drama between Peter, Sophie, and Chase. This and other small quibbles with the story—particularly the dated music references which make the young characters sound more in their 30s—shouldn’t deter readers and make it worthy of consideration for libraries serving teens. The book’s biggest selling points are in the palpable depictions of romance and friendship as a teenager: pining, codependence, jealousy, and intense devotion.

Alex Quay, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA

HOLOCAUST AND WORLD WAR II


The popular *What Was* series presents a careful, thoughtful history of the Holocaust. The editors note that readers will learn who, when, what, and how, but not why, for these adults feel helpless to explain such evil. How dramatic a disclaimer for students! Author Gail Herman writes clearly and succinctly about the creation, duration and end of this terrible disaster. She and illustrator Hoare, through his sensitive pen and ink drawings supported by black and white photographs and maps, give a clear synopsis of personal actions, group events, politics, war and the always underlying anti-Semitism and hate. National politics based on racism created proud Aryans with no guilt for putting innocent people into concentration camps where their lives were precarious and miserable and into ghettos where outnumbered heroic Resistance failed. Hitler’s rule allowed one political party to build revenge into individual extermination and international war. The Holocaust was ended only by Germany’s military defeat, a daunting thought for future movements. The trauma produced survivor silence. In addition to the well-integrated historical narrative, author Herman incorporates sidebars to reflect on important topics such as US immigration, *Mein Kampf*, World War II’s opposing alliances, Anne Frank, memorials and museums, genocide and the Wannsee Conference. The small volume ends with a long chronology and a short bibliography. Targeted readers and older students will be informed and moved by the depths to which orchestrated hate can go.

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


Princess Alice of Greece was not what most children would envision when they think of a princess: born deaf, living in a regular house, and with a complicated personal and family life, not living happily ever after. This short easy-to-read story, based on true events, teaches readers about Princess Alice, a great-granddaughter of Queen Victoria, the mother-in-law of Queen Elizabeth II, and the great-grandmother of Prince William, currently in line for succession to the British throne. In 1943, Princess Alice bravely hides a Jewish family in her home in spite of the suspicions of local Nazi officials and their continual efforts to comb the area for hidden Jews. Young Tilde Cohen and her mother, Rachel, had appealed to Alice for refuge hoping that an earlier offer to help the family if ever in need had been sincere. Alice welcomed them into her home and treated them as guests, spending hours in conversation with them over cups of tea. Alice, although profoundly deaf, was an expert lip-reader. But when the Gestapo pounded on her door demanding entrance and determined to make a thorough search, she put on an accomplished act, gesticulating wildly and making faces as if she were unable to understand a single word said. In frustration, the would-be searcher finally concluded that she was completely incapable of communication and hadn’t the common sense to hide anyone so he went away. The hidden Jews remained safe. Kacer suggests that a possible reason for Princess Alice’s compassion
and her willingness to risk her own life to help a Jewish family was, at least partly, the result of feeling different than those around her due to her inability to hear.

An afterword provides more information about Alice and her family as well as the Nazi invasion of Greece. It details the experiences of Tilde and her family before and during the events recounted in the book. The color illustrations, photorealistic in style, clearly show the shock and fear on the faces of the protagonists, adding additional resonance to the moving story. The language is clear and simple, making this a good introduction to the time period and making the story, although suspenseful, appropriate for younger children who are not yet ready to read about some of the more graphic horrors of the Holocaust.

Michal Hoschander Malen, retired librarian, North Shore Hebrew Academy lower and middle schools; Children’s and YA editor, Jewish Book Council


Fourteen-year-old Helen Rosenthal and her ten-year-old brother, Henry, arrive at a convent in southern France with their French mother from their home in Frankfurt, Germany. Papa has already been arrested, presumably during Kristallnacht. After a poignant farewell, Maman leaves. The two siblings are separated and led to their respective dorm rooms. They are taught Catholic practices and receive new identities. While Helen makes new friends, Henry remains quiet. Instead, he writes his thoughts and feelings into a notebook. The only bright moments he feels are when a mime performs at the convent. This mime, Marcel Marceau, teaches Henry some of his moves. But soon, Nazis infiltrate the French town and come to the convent. They arrest one of the nuns who actually was a Jewish woman in hiding. Mother Superior devises a plan for the Jewish children to be taken in small groups over the border to Switzerland. Marcel Marceau, who is also Jewish, leads Henry, Helen, and their friend Albert to safety.

Kacer is a mastery of plot and emotion. Holocaust narratives tend to focus on family and survival. Masters of Silence achieves both. While there are moments reminiscent of Kacer’s Hiding Edith (2006), the crux of the story, told in alternating viewpoints between Helen and Henry, focuses on their survival strategies and the strength of their sibling relationship. At the same time, the novel relates more about Marcel Marceau’s resistance activities than existing picture books can do. As the back-cover headline states, “Sometimes, keeping quiet is a matter of life and death.” Kacer superbly captures that.

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


Young Francesco Tirelli first lives in Italy where he develops a passion for ice cream from a favorite uncle’s ice cream cart. When Francesco moves to Hungary, he finds there is no comparable confection and eventually decides to open his own ice cream shop in Budapest. His shop is frequented by Peter, a young Jewish boy who loves ice cream as much as Francesco. After some years, World War II starts to encroach on the city. Francesco’s business dwindles and he closes the shop, but he is consumed with concern for the Jews whose lives are threatened. Despite the risk and his friends’ warnings, Francesco declares, “I will help them. I am that someone!” and decides to hide Peter’s family and other Jews in his shop. While in the darkness of their hiding place, the group even finds a clever and beautiful way to celebrate Hanukkah together. After the war, Francesco is able to reopen his shop and Peter moves to Israel, but he is forever impacted by Francesco’s act of kindness. Based on true events, this picture book introduces elements of World War II and the Holocaust and is tempered appropriately by the cheery theme of ice cream woven throughout. Soft and expressive illustrations beautifully accompany this heartwarming tale of bravery and compassion. In a brief epilogue, we learn that Tamar Meir is Peter’s daughter-in-law and that Peter (who became Yitzchak in Israel), successfully appealed to have Francesco Tirelli recognized by Yad Vashem as one of the Righteous Among the Nations.

Martha McMahon, Sinai Akiba Academy, Los Angeles, CA
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens


Moishe Moskowitz’s story, retold by his daughter in first person and interpreted by award-winning poet, Hope Anita Smith, is a unique novel in verse. Moishe is a fourteen-year-old boy living in the city of Kielce, Poland. In seven chapters that gather in terrifying intensity, this rather innocent boy must grow up quickly when the “wolves,” the Nazis, invade his country and his city. Moishe loses his family members—mother, father, sister, brother—to the ravenous appetites of the wolves. He somehow survives the ghetto, forced labor, concentration camps, and more than one death march. As a train carries Moishe and his fellow starving prisoners on an aimless journey through Czechoslovakia, trying to evade the advancing American and Soviet armies, a group of brave women toss freshly baked, still-warm loaves of bread into the open cattle cars. For Moshe, the bread represents more than food; it redeems his hope that goodness can survive the horrors of war. As his father said, “Where there is life, there is hope; where there is hope, there is life.”

The poetic imagery is striking: “There are not enough stars in the night sky, / so they snatch those of us / who wear them on our coats.” And another: “The sun is a Ferris wheel / bringing yesterday around for another spin.” The expressive black and white watercolor illustrations by award-winning illustrator, Lea Lyon, encapsulate and extend the narrative. The design and layout are attractive, with generous margins and ample leading. Headings seem to be hand lettered while the verses are in a sans serif font. An author’s note at the back adds useful background information. A few typos and other errors mar the book. Hopefully, they will be corrected in the final version.

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


Twelve-year-old Charlotte, Charlie for short, loves to look at old photographs of her family. She is especially interested in photos of the woman she was named for, Lottie, her mother’s aunt who presumably perished in the Holocaust. Like Charlie, she played the violin. Charlie receives a school project assignment to research her family’s history and seizes the opportunity to find out more about Lottie, since no one knows for sure what happened to her after she left Vienna for Budapest to study music. She deepens her relationship with her grandmother living in Florida while trying to learn more about Lottie and appreciates Lottie’s music diary that her grandmother sends her. On her own, she finds someone in a nursing home who knew Lottie and also befriends a Hungarian man who can translate an important letter. Meanwhile, her pesky older brother turns into an advocate and Charlie develops a romantic interest in a boy in the school orchestra. Ultimately, Charlie finds herself as she unravels the mystery of Lottie’s fate and forges connections with Lottie’s daughter.

Ross based this narrative on her own family history. While that can sometimes be problematic, that is not the case here. The story is poignant and reveals that all we are told about the Holocaust via family stories may not actually be true. An author’s note explains Ross’ family history. Still, the idea of a school project is certainly not a new one and the plot is overcomplicated with the love interest and an out-of-town best friend. For a better constructed mystery involving a school project, see Laura Toffler-Corrie’s The Life and Opinions of Amy Finawitz (Roaring Brook Press, 2010).

Barbara Krasner, former member, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee, Somerset, NJ
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens


Irena Sendler was a Polish-Catholic social worker who, as part of her work with the secret Zegota organization, helped to save the lives of more than two thousand Jewish children. She used unique methods such as carrying children out in baskets or placing them in carpenter boxes. Some were brought to the “Aryan” side by hiding on trucks. All attempts were risky and Irena was eventually betrayed to the Nazis. She endured torture and was scheduled for execution. But Zegota managed to save her through bribes. Then she went into hiding. She is famous for keeping strips of paper in buried jars with the birth names of the children she saved. Yad Vashem named her Righteous Among the Nations in the 1960s.

This book is an unsuccessful mashup of Vaughan and Mazellan’s original text and illustration from *Irena’s Jar of Secrets* (Lee and Low, 2011) and new sidebar material written by Michele Simms-Burton, who only receives copyright credit. Two-page contextual sidebars interrupt the chaptered picture book text and repeat some of the narrative. One-third of the book is back matter. Much better choices would be the original 2011 picture book and Tilar Mazzeo’s *Irena’s Children: A Story of True Courage*, Young Readers Edition (2017).

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

LIFECYCLE AND JEWISH VALUES


Benny wants to make people happy, but he thinks that he needs lots of money to buy them beautiful and expensive gifts. His friend Tzvi shows him how you can give a wonderful gift to all the important people in your life, and it doesn’t have to cost anything. What could be so special? Together the boys explore their community while identifying all the people who are important in their lives, and Benny tries to figure out what this mysterious gift could possibly be. It’s a gift the Rabbis tell us we should give people we meet to make them feel good. “It’s gift you can give any time any place; And all that you need is your bright shining face.”

Bright, colorful illustrations by Miri Rooney create a feeling of warmth, love, and close friendship in which the friends explore their neighborhood and greet their friends, neighbors, and local storekeepers. The mystery gift is finally revealed: Greet every person with a friendly face and smile (*Kabel kol ahdam b’sei’ver panim yaafos*), which brings the theme full circle to create a satisfying and happy ending. The source of the quote, Ethics of the Fathers (*Pirkei Avos*), Chapter One, Verse 15 is not included. The laminated pages are perfect for little hands to touch and enjoy while the rhyming text creates a lively atmosphere of fun, humor, and adventure. A short glossary of Hebrew and Yiddish terms is located in the front of the book.

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


Rhyming text (somewhat belabored) gives a definition of the Hebrew phrase *kol hakavod*, and then provides examples of ways young readers can earn this expression of respect, with an emphasis on being kind to others. You might hear *kol hakavod*, says the text, if you give your subway seat to someone who needs it, ask a lonely classmate to color with you, or put your toys away without being asked. Cartoonish illustrations in a combination of spot art and full-bleed spreads, with a welcome diverse cast, offer more examples: “lending a hand” is illustrated with two kids picking up recycling together,
and “when a person needs help, and you understand” accompanies a child adding a coin to a tzedakah box. Useful and relatable if didactic, this picture book should lend itself well to reading aloud and encourage children to think about instances where they can say--and earn--kol hakavod.

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


This board book with Jewish words and concepts from Afikomen to Zayde is a real find. Alphabetical entries are arranged on full color, sturdy 7-inch square pages with short, somewhat rhyming explanations, some rhymes better than others: “B is for bagels and babka so sweet, brisket with gravy, and borscht made from beets. C is for challah. Challah is braided and baked golden brown. D is for dreidel. A dreidel, a top, is for spinning around.”

The illustrations are clever, rendered in an unusual palette for babies and toddlers, including pink, turquoise, gray, olive green, and orange. The concepts are introduced on each page, with humorous images, not quite caricatures, playing with facial expressions and relative size enough to keep adults smiling while helping children understand some of the ideas that will be new to them. The collection of words is large and varied, most Hebrew with some Yiddish, with some letters represented by one word, others by several: L is only for latkes, while M is for matzo ball, mitzvah, mazel tov, mensch, maror, menorah, and mezuzah. Many will be familiar, even to a very young child, but others, like for the letter N, may be beyond the comprehension of the target audience: “At the Passover Seder, everyone will wish for ‘next year in Jerusalem’ after the last dish.”

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

**NONFICTION**


Included in a series with books about Asperger’s Syndrome, Bipolar Disorder, Depression, Gender Diversity, and Eating Disorders, give the impression that “Being Jewish” is some form of medical syndrome or deep personal problem that people need an introduction to in order to handle a Jew correctly. The explanation of “Being Jewish” is given by Ruth to her Muslim friend, Ayla, by way of a diary that Ruth has been keeping. Ruth adds explanations throughout her diary so that Ayla will understand what she is writing about. Ruth basically has been writing about the Jewish year just prior to and following her Bat Mitzvah. Everything is covered, but in no real depth, from the Jewish holidays to the life cycle, conversion to intermarriage, with Israel, the Holocaust, the difference between Jews, Christians and Muslims and Jewish ideas of God all thrown in for good measure.

Because this book comes from a British publisher some of the content may be confusing to American readers. Little things like spelling differences (centre) or language differences (mum for mom or plaited for braided) can be jarring. And, of course, there are differences between liberal Judaism in the United Kingdom and liberal Judaism in the United States, for example, statements like “Being Jewish is passed on …through our mothers.” or “My cousins in New York talk about going to the ‘temple,’ which is what Americans call the synagogue.” Then there are a few random comments like, “Went to shul this morning. It was a bit boring, even though there was a Bar-Mitzvah, but I played with my phone for a while and it sort of passed the time.” There is no place for this title in a Jewish library, nor does it feel appropriate for any public or school library.

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


A young boy, Marky, and his elderly neighbor, Mr. Tempkin, develop a sweet friendship. Marky is on summer break, and eager to have something to do, so he helps Mr. Tempkin in his garden. Marky’s parents explain his actions are a *mitzvah*. The old man reveals the four things in life that keep him going: walking daily to synagogue, smelling his roses, listening to birds and having Marky as his friend. Mr. Tempkin is active and determined; when the squirrels attack his bird feeder he climbs a tree to hang the feeder higher. Losing his balance he falls and sprains his ankle. Wheelchair bound, he can no longer walk to morning service. Marky helps to push Mr. Tempkin back and forth every day in the wheelchair. Marky meets the rabbi who gives him a *kippah* to wear at service. Marky’s parents explain he is acting like a *mensch*; Mr. Tempkin calls it teamwork. As Mr. Tempkin heals, their friendship grows warmer; by summer’s end both young and old realize there is nothing like a friend and that good deeds lift the spirit of the giver as well as the recipient.

The illustrations abound with expressive faces which enhance the action of the text and the emotion of the slight story. They also reveal a well-kept, multiracial neighborhood. The synagogue sports a Star of David, but no house has a mezuzah. Here is a lovely story of an observant Jewish man facing the frailties of age as he helps a youngster flourish by doing good deeds. The charm of the characters overcomes a pabulum plot, to introduce young readers to the concepts of *mitzvot* and *mensch*.

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


In a modern retelling of the traditional collection of the *Wise Men of Chelm* by Solomon Simon (originally published in 1942), the people who reside in Chelm have a unique perspective on life, the world’s problems, and Jewish traditions. In a nod to gender equality in this new version, Rabbi Devora guides the Chelmites in their adventures as they try to lure the moon down to their town, preserve the beauty of newly fallen snow, send postcards to God, and find the best way to get to Heaven. Mayor Malka also assists the townspeople in their search for solutions to their dilemmas. Chelm stories for this new generation have references to YouTube, people of color, and a woman rabbi while still maintaining the timeless old country setting of these beloved stories. As Kimmel tells us in his Author’s Note, “After all, no race, religion, nationality, or gender has a monopoly on foolishness.”

Kimmel’s love of Jewish folklore is evident in the stories and how he treats his characters. He introduces them as if they were to become our friends and neighbors. The stories are very warm and personal. The characters are important, beloved, and teach many important lessons about life and people. Steve Brown’s black and white drawings, capturing the funny situations and problems encountered in these stories, will keep readers smiling.

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


If you have a choice of words to tell your tale, why not pick the most colorful, comical, powerful, descriptive, fun vocabulary. Yiddish! Oft repeated words tell this story, allowing the reader to retain many of these new, funny sounding expressions. A youngster trips on the way home; he falls, dislodges his shoe, worse, he loses his notebook from which he must study for a test the next day. With the help of
his extended family the boy learns fifty-one Yiddish expressions and impresses his teacher. Each word appears in a box at the bottom of the page with formal translation into English; each flies around the illustrations to underline the point of the new word. The layout is dynamic and eye-catching, aiding the grand illustrations, making the words as important as the people. Here is a genuine read-aloud book. Its humor is catching and the new words become part of the reader in a painless, valuable way. Adults reading the story will enjoy as much as the listening youngsters. Readers will cheer as the protagonist punts, wins with Yiddish, then finds his own English notebook after the test is over.

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


Hillel the Elder is portrayed as a jocular, playful teacher of a group of young children during the Second Temple period in this well-intentioned but misguided attempt to teach the virtue of cleanliness. Rabbi Hillel shows his students a cloth and tells them he will use it to do a *mitzvah.* The children then guess various *mitzvot* that the cloth could be used for, including giving charity, keeping the Sabbath and honoring one’s parents. Hillel explains each *mitzvah,* but his explanations fall short of providing accurate reasons. For example, “honoring one’s parents reminds us of everything that God commanded at Mount Sinai.” Giving charity “reminds us that everyone deserves justice and mercy in God’s world.”

The central theme of the book is to promote the concept that cleanliness is a *mitzvah.* Hillel brings the children to watch people cleaning a large statue of the king in the marketplace. He tells them that just as the workers keep the statue gleaming to honor the king, so we should all keep ourselves clean because we are made in the image of God. The use of a Roman statue, which was abhorrent to the Jews of his time and throughout the ages (indeed, many Jews have been killed because they refused to prostrate themselves before statues) is an inappropriate way to teach a Jewish concept. The jarring image of Rabbi Hillel using the statue as a teaching tool is quite unsettling. The well-known story of Hillel teaching Torah to a non-Jew who demanded to learn it on one foot is mentioned, but his real message of tolerance and empathy is overlooked. The famous words he is said to have used, “Do unto others…That is the whole Torah. Now, go and study” are all there, but the meaning of the story is lost in favor of the flippant description of the mocker who “sheepishly put his foot back down and signed up for some classes!” The jokiness of the story is reflected in its cartoonish illustrations.

Joyce Levine, former AJL-SSC President and AJL Publications Chair, North Shore Hebrew Academy H.S. (retired), Boynton Beach, FL

**SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS**


Told in simple rhyme, four friends, Jackie and Jesse and Joni and Jae, join their congregation on Rosh Hashanah for *tashlich* at the river. At first the friends are unsure why they’re bringing stale bread, “Is this bread for the ducks or a game that we’ll play?” but soon Rabbi Miriam explains that it’s a chance to say “sorry” and to throw away the “mistakes” they’ve made. The four friends sit and reflect on things they might have done that hurt each other and take the time to apologize before throwing their breadcrumbs into the river and heading home.

Battuz’s illustrations are bright and appealing. The reader can easily see the emotions on the faces of the diverse characters and uses a similar color palette for the four friends so that they’re easily spotted on every page. The Author’s Note includes very basic introduction to Rosh Hashanah and some questions to reflect on Rosh Hashanah and fixing mistakes.

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

During each night of Hanukkah, a little girl wishes for a pet – a puppy, a bird, a kitten, a hamster and so on. Instead, she gets a series of strange presents – a heat lamp, a thermometer, a plant, a water mister, to name a few. At the same time, her grandmother is also receiving some strange gifts – candied cranberries, chocolate chips, oven mitts, an apron…what is going on? It turns out that the little girl is getting everything she needs for her new pet – an iguana from the animal shelter, while her grandma has received everything she needs to make the little girl’s favorite treat -- Cranberry Chocolate Chip Kugel.

Simple language unfolds the story. Each night of Hanukkah, a different type of latke is served. Potato latkes with applesauce, carrot latkes with sour cream, turnip latkes with brown sugar are all part of the menu. Each night of Hanukkah, a different – and quite unusual - present is unwrapped. While there is much confusion, in the end, everyone has received exactly what they had hoped for. The crayon, colored pencil and watercolor marker illustrations are charming and very expressive. The little girl’s eyes are wide when she opens the heat lamp, confused with the ceramic bowl, furious when on the eighth night there is no present to unwrap and delighted when the iguana is delivered. There is a recipe for Cranberry Chocolate Chip Kugel included at the back of the book. A lovely Hanukkah story about interesting family traditions and unexpected results and a nice, new addition to the Hanukkah picture book collection.

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


Taking inspiration from the Talmudical statement that an elephant can be used as a Sukkah wall (author’s note) Mandell presents a somewhat silly, but very heartwarming tale of Sukkot and *hachnasat orchim* (inviting guests). Henry the elephant loves to sing, but when he is literally put out to pasture he finds that he has no one with whom or for whom to sing. That is, until one night he hears singing nearby and discovers the Brenner family happily celebrating Sukkot with songs. Henry listens in and quickly learns the songs. When he returns the next night and is heard singing along, Ori, a member of the Brenner family discovers Henry and invites Henry to join them. Obviously, Henry does not fit into the sukkah. Thinking creatively, the Brenners take out one wall of the Sukkah, and Henry acts as the wall himself, therefore participating in the holiday celebrations.

The illustrations in this fun story are bright, bold, and textured, helping to enhance the story which would make for an excellent read aloud for the younger crowd. A fun story of celebration and including everyone with a fun nod to the Talmudical source (Babylonian Talmud - Sukkah 23a-b).

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


On the first night of Chanukah, a boy asks his Grandma when she will be making his special latkes. She replies that she will prepare them for the last night as a treat just like her mother and grandmother did. But then Dad comes up with the new and exciting idea: a family competition to see who can come up with the best latke recipe. Grandma seems reluctant but agrees to participate. The other family members join in with great enthusiasm and become very busy researching recipes, checking their pots and pans, and buying ingredients. Grandpa and the boy will judge. On the night of the big cook-off, the family gathers together to light the menorah, and then each person is allotted 30 minutes to create his/her special latkes. Mom and Dad each make unique and unusual latke recipes which are tasty but
Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens

have strange ingredients or cooking methods. Grandma makes her traditional family latke recipe, and they are crisp and delicious as always and Grandma wins!

This fun story will spark discussions on friendly competition, family traditions, and the joy of Hanukkah. But how does one feel when the traditions are changed? Especially children who come to expect the familiar holiday observances year after year? Grandma’s traditional latke recipe is at the end of the book with detailed instructions. There is no discussion of the historical significance of the holiday or other Hanukkah customs, although a menorah icon is used to mark each day of the holiday within the story.

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


Preschoolers are sure to identify with Noah, who prefers trucks to Hanukkah candles. “I like candles, but I like trucks better. Could we have eight trucks of Hanukkah this year?” he asks his parents, who devise a way to incorporate some of the concepts of the holiday such as the bravery and strength of the Maccabees with his favorite toy. Noah’s relatives from far and near comply by showering him with presents (trucks, of course!) and as he carries each night’s gift up to his bedroom, he creates his own “menorah” made of trucks. The soft full color illustrations, replete with detail portraying a happy Jewish household, loving parents and a large shaggy dog, enhance the story. However, an awkward placement of text and illustrations detracts from the climax of the book. The next to last page describes how his parents find all the trucks lined up in a row in Noah’s room, listing each one in turn, but the corresponding illustration is placed after the final page turn. Young listeners would certainly have enjoyed identifying and pointing to each type of truck as it is named. Instead, the last spread shows the key picture along with Noah’s explanation of his play menorah and how he imagines himself the Shamash who tells each truck when to shine. Despite this flaw, the book is sure to delight listeners and parents alike. Note that this book assumes some basic familiarity with Hanukkah, as there is no explanation of the words *shamash* and *latkes*.

Joyce Levine, former AJL-SSC President and AJL Publications Chair, North Shore Hebrew Academy H.S. (retired), Boynton Beach, FL


Saralee Siegel has a super-power, her super-nose that can tell the exact ingredients that went into any dish she can smell. A very handy super-power, as she lives with her multigenerational family above their family restaurant, Siegel House. Rosh Hashanah is approaching, and it is time for her Zayde, the restaurant’s head chef, to make his famous and delicious apple cake. It contains a secret ingredient that Saralee has been unable to figure out even after many years of trying. It “smells sweet yet spicy, zesty yet bland, tart yet un-tart.” Unfortunately, Zayde trips and falls down the cellar stairs, breaking his leg and getting a concussion which leaves him confused. As he goes to the hospital in an ambulance, he is unable to give Saralee the secret to his apple cake.

As the apple cake orders come pouring into the restaurant, Saralee is confounded. On top of it all, a new restaurant, Perfection on a Platter, has opened in their town, and they too are making a delicious apple cake for the New Year. And to add to the stress and excitement, a competition has been announced, with a renowned food critic coming to town to taste and review both apple cakes! Restaurant rivalry, spying, ambiguous clues, frustrating hunts, and finally, Saralee figures out the secret ingredient – Rosh Hashanah wishes! A different New Year’s wish must be recited over every batch of cake. The effect is – DELICIOUS! Charming line drawings complement the text. An engaging, delightful and timely story for the New Year.

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