Seven Questions with...

Bestselling Author Alyson Richman

A JL News and Reviews Editor in Chief Sally Stieglitz spoke with international bestselling author Alyson Richman, whose novels have been translated into 25 languages. Richman may be best known for The Lost Wife, which is currently being made into a major motion picture.

AJL: Thank you for chatting with AJL News and Reviews! I want to start by asking why do you think readers are so drawn to historical fiction, which is a hugely popular genre? Is it a bit of a time travel experience?

AR: Thank you for having me! I think many readers are drawn to historical fiction because they are able to learn about a different time in history from multiple perspectives, while also enjoying a good story. I believe historical fiction is best when a reader feels they are walking in the footsteps of a character and are able to see the world and history unfolding through their lens. It makes history feel more alive for them. I know when I’m researching one of my novels, I try to find diaries written during that time-period, so I can glean what someone living then might have experienced in their daily life such as their fears, their challenges, and their longings. I always want to bring those emotions back into my writing. It’s a way of making sure that my characters are both historically and emotionally authentic.

AJL: You studied art history and Japanese studies at Wellesley College. What was your path to becoming a writer and how have those subjects informed your writing?

AR: I’ve always loved to write. It was actually one of my art history professors at Wellesley that first told me that I had a gift for telling “the story behind a painting.” It was true, I loved putting the painting in historical context and searching for clues that the artist might be communicating within their art. I also loved the psychological component, asking myself what was the relationship between the artist and their muse and vice versa. During my senior year in college, I thought to myself: if I could do anything in the world what would it be? And the answer was that I wanted to write novels that explored the creative experience against a certain time period. If you look at all my novels- from my first, The Mask Carver’s Son, to my most recent, The Thread Collectors, you’ll see that I’ve

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always stuck to my original passion-writing about artists whether they’re painters, musicians, actors or dancers, against a turbulent time in history.

AJL: As librarians, we’re very interested in the research process for writers and particularly for writers of historical fiction...can you tell us more about how you do research?

AR: My research is pretty extensive and I try to do as much of it as possible before I begin the process of actually writing the book! The first thing I do is read as much as I can about the time period I’m writing about. I also seek out the guidance of librarians or academics who might be aware of reading materials that could be especially helpful. In the case of my novels, like *The Rhythm of Memory*, that explores the violent Pinochet regime in Chile or *The Last Wife*, that delves into the artistic community inside the Czech concentration camp of Terezin during WWII, I try to connect with survivors who are open to sharing their experiences.

Oral histories are an amazing resource and I am grateful to every person who is willing to share their story with me. I believe they make my novels so much richer because they add another layer of truth, knowledge and emotion to the book.

AJL: *The Last Wife* is in the process of becoming a major motion picture, congratulations!! As a creator and artist, how do you feel about the collaboration between book writers and filmmakers (including the screenwriters, actors, directors, etc)? Is it difficult to let go of the story and trust others who may not share your vision? Or is it an act of faith? Or something else?

AR: It’s quite exciting, of course. But there’s still so many pieces that need to come in place before it gets to production. We’re in the development stage where there is a script and director, but the next level when you’re in front of the camera is the goal. I think trust, faith, and patience are crucial to the process. In the meantime, I try to focus on my books and writing and not get too distracted by it.

AJL: Your most recent novel, *The Thread Collectors*, which takes place during the civil war, is a collaboration between you and Shaunna J. Edwards. How did that come about? And what were the challenges of co-writing a book so seamlessly?

AR: Shaunna and I have been friends for over a decade and our friendship has always been cemented by our mutual love of books. Our idea to start working on a novel began during the Covid-19 pandemic and after the brutal murder of George Floyd. We wanted to write a novel that would delve into one of America’s darkest periods of history, yet ultimately create something that would build bridges and promote healing. The greatest challenge was the fact that we couldn’t see each other in person as often as we’d like. But every Sunday, we’d brainstorm plot ideas and then I would begin drafting what I like to call “the working armature” of the chapter in a Google doc. Then, Shaunna would go in and add details and then I’d return to it and we’d continue working on those twenty pages or so until they were perfect. Only then did we move onto the next chapter. This enabled us to create one seamless voice that rang true to both of our ears.

AJL: Let’s pivot for a moment, if you don’t mind, back to your childhood. What books were favorites? Did you go to the library as a child?

AR: I loved going to the library! And I always wanted to take out more than the five books I was allowed! My favorite childhood books were: *Amelia Bedelia, Pippi Longstocking, Ramona the Pest...* Do you see a trend here? I liked characters that march to the beat of their own drum.

AJL: We always like to ask, what are you reading now? Do you read in your own genre of historical fiction, or do you prefer to step away a bit?

AR: I’m currently reading *The Covenant of Water* by Abraham Verghese. I was a huge fan of his other novel, *Cutting for Stone* and this new one doesn’t disappoint. He’s a master storyteller and his writing is exquisite. It’s several hundred pages long so it will be keeping me busy for a while.

Our thanks to Alyson Richman for speaking with us! For more information on Alyson’s work, visit her webpage, AlysonRichman.com.

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**Does ALA Connect Censor Its Members? Post on Free Children’s ebooks about Israel Deemed a Code of Conduct Violation**

BY PATRICIA SARLES, MA, MLS, MSED

am a longstanding member of ALA and several of its subdivisions: AASL, YALSA, ALSC, and ACRL and post infrequently in ALA Connect. So when I shared a post about free ebooks for kids about Israel from Kar-Ben Publishing and got an email later that day saying that my post was taken down and that I had violated the code of conduct for posting it, I was baffled. And much later in the day, I became angry. How could sharing free resources, books no less (!) for kids violate the code of conduct? I wrote back to Cory Stevenson, Staff Liaison for ALA Connect who had sent me the code of conduct violation email, and I asked him why and how this could have violated the code of conduct. I did not get a straight answer. He did tell me though that I could elevate this to the Code of Conduct Committee and I said absolutely yes to that. I was certain the Code of Conduct Committee would absolve me. After all, these were free resources for kids.

Cory told me I would have to wait until the next time the committee meets. I patiently waited two weeks before contacting him again. When I learned that yes they had met but that there had been no decision yet made on my “violation,” I was not happy. I was still left with a giant question: How could free ebooks for kids

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about Israel be deemed a code of conduct violation in the first place? I concluded that the committee members must be reading every single one of the children’s books about Israel that I had shared and that is why they needed more time. They needed to see for themselves that the books I shared were benign and non-political. I pushed Cory yet again but realized he had no power in this situation. So, after six weeks, I finally reached out to the co-chairs of the Code of Conduct Committee myself and soon received the letter I had been expecting exonerating me of the violation I was accused of. But what exactly had I been accused of? This was not in the letter. So I wrote back and told them that I expected an apology for having been accused in the first place and I also pressed them to tell me exactly what the problem was with my post. I was happy to hear back from them wherein the first paragraph stated they would try to address my questions, but then none of my questions were addressed.

In the meantime, I had started to cc Emily Drabinski, ALA president, on my many emails. I know I was sounding like a broken record but I had been accused of violating the code of conduct for sharing free ebooks for kids about Israel from Kar-Ben Publishing and had never received an acceptable answer as to how this could have possibly violated the code of conduct and why exactly I had been accused. Also, what exact code had I violated? Emily sent me an email saying that we could talk about it and that I should show some grace to the Code of Conduct Committee librarians who do this work voluntarily. I wrote Emily back and outlined my specific questions, also reminding her that all of my letters had been polite. She offered that we speak on the phone and we spoke. I asked her why — my number one question. She told me what the committee would not tell me, that someone reported my post as a violation because the password was taken off. The username for the Kar-Ben books was Israel and the password was IsraelSolidarity2023! My anonymous colleague at ALA reported me for the password. I told Emily that it is a knee jerk reaction to take a post down and accuse the poster of violating the code of conduct simply because someone takes offense to a password. She agreed and said it was regrettable but that is the imperfect way that ALA Connect works. You are guilty until proven innocent. You are told you have violated the code of conduct until you are told that you have not. So I said that I could report someone’s post and that post would just automatically be taken down? And she said, yes.

I was curious about this because after my sharing of free ebooks for kids about Israel, another librarian had posted a list of children’s books about Palestine. This post was not taken down yet the books about Israel were. I was wondering whether something sinister, conspiratorial, and parapolitical was going on here. In my many inquiries with Cory and the Code of Conduct Committee I kept asking why the Palestine books were allowed to remain. All I was told was that I could report the post if I wanted to. I did not want to. Not knowing how things worked over at ALA Connect, I began to wonder if books about Israel were being suppressed, silenced, censored, and prohibited. I was getting even angrier, especially with no responses forthcoming from the ALA folks.

In my many emails to Cory and the co-chairs, I kept alerting them to the fact that P is for Palestine, a children’s alphabet book in which I stands for Intifada and one of the books shared by another ALA member on Connect, could be interpreted as antisemitic. This was never addressed or acknowledged. Meanwhile, on the same day I shared my post (October 25, 2023), I received a vitriolic email with a San Jose State University email address from another member:

“I am absolutely disgusted by this. As someone who is supposedly educated, has their Masters, and should be able to discern between varieties of misinformation, that you would put out “Solidarity with Israel.”

“Solidarity with Israel? An apartheid state under international law? A state committing war crimes under international law?

“SHAME ON YOU. SHAME ON ALL ZIONISTS!

“Zionism is upheld by white supremacy and settler colonialism. Shame on you. You are a White supremacist. Disgusting. And during a genocide against Palestinians.

Never again means never again for ALL people. Go and educate yourself.”

I began to wonder how all of this was allowed. I share free ebooks for kids about Israel with my librarian colleagues, my post is reported and taken down, essentially suggesting to me that I can’t share books about Israel, the kids’ books about Palestine are allowed to stay, and I receive this email from another librarian. What is going on here?!

These were among my many questions. When I spoke with Emily, she patiently explained to me how ALA Connect operates. It isn’t perfect, she admitted, but that is how it works, so there was nothing sinister going on about my post about free ebooks for kids about Israel being taken down. For seven weeks I had been so angry about this that I wanted to write an op/ed for the New York Times. I told this to Emily, and after my conversation with her, I have decided not to. She did say that she needed ALA members to come together because the world was so divided right now.

This entire ordeal outraged me. I was wondering whether Israel was being cast out, excluded, and ostracized by ALA. I was wondering why a fellow librarian felt entirely comfortable sending me that email, and I was wondering why the books about Palestine were allowed to remain. I did receive an exculpatory letter but never an apology for having been accused and never a satisfactory answer about the books for Palestine being allowed to remain even after I pointed out that one can read the entire P is for Palestine book on YouTube to see the offensive page on the letter I for themselves.

Patricia has been a medical librarian, a public librarian, an academic librarian, and a school librarian for 35 years. She is the founder and editor of the blogs, Donor Conception, Surrogacy, and IVF: Books for Children and YA Books for Donor Offspring. She lives in New York City.
Challah

Jackie Ben-Efraim

Long before I was raising funds for AJL as VP of Development, I was raising dough for my challah. I was unsure how I would raise money for AJL when I first started in my position, but I have mentors who’ve helped me succeed. So if you’ve had a fear of working with yeast dough, the instructions below should help you succeed as well.

If you think it takes too long to make challah since you need to wait for the dough to rise twice, just think of those wait times as opportunities to complete a task for the AJL committee you work with or time to read all of the articles in News and Reviews and Judaica Librarianship, or view missed AJL online events on YouTube.

¾ C. Boiling water
3 T. Cold water
½ C. Sugar
3 T. Oil
½ tsp. Salt
¼ tsp. Saffron, this is essential, and less expensive at a Middle Eastern store.
1 T. Dry yeast, use Rapid Rise by Fleischmann’s if you’re short on time
½ C. Warm water (110°, or the hottest your finger can tolerate)
2 Extra large eggs or vegan egg substitute Just Eggs.
4-5 C. Bread flour, I prefer King Author
1 tsp. Baking powder
¼ c. Poppy or sesame seeds (optional)

1. In a medium bowl mix sugar, oil, salt and saffron with boiling water until sugar is completely dissolved. Add cold water, leave a metal spoon in the bowl to help the mixture cool.
2. Dissolve the yeast in the warm water along with 1 T. sugar. Check that your yeast has foamed up, if it hasn’t, try again in a fresh cup with cooler water.
3. Beat 1 egg in a separate cup.
4. Add yeast and egg to the cooled oil and water mixture from step 1.
5. In a large bowl measure 3-1/2 cups flour and stir in baking powder. Slowly stir in the liquid to form a ball. Knead well by folding and pushing dough away from you on a floured board.
6. Place dough in an oiled bowl covered with a clean towel (or zip bag sprayed with cooking release spray and loosely closed) in a warm place (90°) for an hour until doubled in size, OR place the mixture in the refrigerator overnight. Many ovens now have a proofing setting, which also speeds up the rising process.
7. Punch down dough on a floured work surface. Pinch off a piece of dough to fulfill the commandment of taking challah if that is your custom.
8. Braid dough into desired shape. Place on a baking sheet on parchment paper (not from your rare book room), or non-stick foil. Cover with a towel and let rise another 45 minutes at 90°.
9. Beat the second egg with a teaspoon of water. Glaze challah with the egg, sprinkle seeds if desired.
10. Preheat the oven to 375°. Bake the challah for 25 minutes OR, for better results, follow the directions in step 11.
11. Preheat the oven to 400°. Place challah in the hot oven, mist with cold water from a spray bottle. Bake for 5 minutes. Lower oven temperature to 375°, open oven, turn challah and mist again. Bake for 6 minutes. Lower oven temperature last time to 350°, open oven, turn challah and mist again. Bake for 7 minutes. You can mist again. Challah will bake for about 25 minutes, but each oven is different. In order to check for doneness, turn the bread over and tap lightly. If there is a hollow sound and golden on top it’s done.
12. Cool challah on a rack for at least 20 minutes before eating and cool completely before freezing.

My children always called the smell of baking challah the smell of Shabbat. I hope your version will bring the same joy to your home.
**Chapter Chatter**

AJL-Canada will present A Canadian Jewish Author Showcase on Sunday May 7 at 1 p.m. EDT. We will feature AJL-Canada members: Braydon Bernstein, Nancy Cohen, Tziporah Cohen, Anne Dublin, Gila Green, Kathy Kacer, and Joanne Levy. We hope that all AJL members will attend as we highlight the new and varied books for young people that our talented Canadian members have created.

**Anne Dublin, Membership Chair, AJL-Canada**

The Association of Jewish Libraries/ Capital Area Chapter had a Zoom program on Sunday, December 3, 2023 in conjunction with Classrooms without Borders and our national Association of Jewish Libraries. Jackie Ben Efрам, provided technical support for the program. Gail Sharazi, our Vice-President of AJL-CAC, helped with the organization and presentation of the program.

Sarah Birnbach, who recently began a new career as a non-fiction author, gave an overview of her memoir, A Daughter’s Kaddish: My Year of Grief, Devotion, and Healing, which was published by Wonderwell Press in September 2022. The book is now available on Audible and read by Sarah. In Judaism, the 5th commandment is to honor our parents. Sarah exemplified a commitment to this commandment by her 11-month journey to honor her father’s soul. In doing so, she broke with Jewish tradition as a woman reciting daily Kaddish. Making time in a very busy schedule, she incorporated twice daily religious and spiritual practices by attending a minyan in a synagogue either her own or locating one when traveling. She ultimately discovered how the path of faith can lead to true healing and transformation. Nathan Risen, a reviewer for the AJL News & Reviews wrote, “A Daughter’s Kaddish is recommended as an engaging reading for women who might consider saying Kaddish for a parent, as well as to men and especially Rabbis and lay leaders so that they may be more supportive of women who want to say Kaddish for a parent…”

Sadly, but especially during these times, the opportunity to recite Kaddish might very likely arise. Sarah’s presentation reinforced the impact of reciting Kaddish for the deceased along with reinforcing that this is an option now available for women.

**Ellen Share, President**

**Capital Area Chapter/Association of Jewish Libraries**

**Member News**

Ray Pun (along with Loida Garcia-Febo and Robin Kear) will be co-teaching an Introduction to Global Librarianship course for Library Juice Academy in March 2024. The course focuses on international engagement opportunities for librarians and archivists. This course dives into issues and trends impacting libraries globally.

My daughter, an IDF reservist, was stationed 10 km from Gaza for over two months. She was working as a communications technician for a medic unit. She was recently released from active duty for the next 6 months to recuperate from her time there. She’s been a member of the IDF for nine years, and a reservist for seven of those years. When she was released, she made her way to the states, and surprised me at my home. It was a relief to see her in person!

Library chatter: My small synagogue library was gifted over 64 boxes of Judaica from a rabbi/librarian/friend who passed away earlier this year (יהודית יפה). I use Libib as my online cataloging tool. I have been slowly cataloging the extra books and have over 450 that will soon be processed. That will bring the total titles to over 4,500 in the collection. My friend and colleague, Rabbi Teresa Snyder, received her smicha from JTS, and worked as a circuit rabbi for the prison system of New York. Her additions to our library enhance our community and provide important resources for our synagogue.

**Susan Pankowsky, Librarian, Edward T. Goldstein Library, West End Synagogue Nashville, TN**

**President’s Letter**

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to you a few days after attending LibLearnX’s Youth Media Awards, where I announced the winners of the Sydney Taylor Book Awards to a live and virtual audience of thousands. Our award being included among the most significant children’s book awards in the country, like the Newbery and the Caldecott, was truly wonderful, and I was honored to represent AJL for that announcement. At LibLearnX, we also held our usual “Schmooze and Nosh,” where we met many new and familiar faces of librarians interested in Judaic knowledge. Upcoming in February, we’ll get to meet the ALA Presidential candidates (one of which is an AJL member!) — please join us to ask all of your questions about their plans for the broader librarian community.

These smaller meetings at the conference in Baltimore made me very excited to think about our wonderful upcoming conference in San Diego (registration is open!) — the conference committee has already been meeting for a few months, and the programs promise to be spectacular. We have generous funding for conference assistance, so please apply if the cost is difficult - our goal at AJL is to include as many of you as possible at our bi-annual in-person gathering.

Another event I participated in this month was the pre-conference gathering for the International Conference of Judaica Curators. There again, I was able to represent AJL’s participation on the joint National Library of Israel-Association of Jewish Libraries’ White Paper on Judaica Provenance, which includes practical guidance toward the complicated questions related to acquisition and provenance in Jewish Studies. A draft of the paper will be added to the AJL website in the coming weeks, and further discussions around provenance and practical solutions will be held in the coming months (and of course, at our annual conference in June!)

Wishing all of you joy and peace in the coming months,

Michelle

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Renaming the Fresno State Library: Removing the Name of a Known Antisemite

Sarah McDaniels, Fresno State Library

On July 13, 2022, the California State University (CSU) Board of Regents approved a resolution to rename the library at CSU - Fresno, removing the name of founding Dean Henry Madden following the discovery of his lifelong antisemitic and racist views. The vote was the culmination of a semester of full-on work by a Task Force charged by President Saul Jimenez-Sandoval. As then-Associate Dean and the sole Jewish member of the library staff, I coordinated the library’s participation in the project and volunteered to participate in the Writing Subcommittee that authored the Final Report. I’m still reckoning with the meaning of this project. I’ve spoken with numerous student and community groups, but it’s taken longer to begin speaking about it in library circles.

Just before Thanksgiving, 2021, the Library Administration Office received a surprising phone call from a member of the President’s Leadership Team. They had just learned that Henry Madden, the Library Dean our building was then named after, had held lifelong antisemitic views and Nazi sympathies, and they needed confirmation of this dramatic discovery so that we could take immediate action. The information came to the President’s attention when a history class was assigned Dr. Bradley Hart’s Hitler\'s American Friends (2018). The passage had received little notice when the book was published, but these students wanted to know if the Nazi sympathizer described was the same person our library was named for. That very afternoon, I read Hart’s book chapter and worked with the Special Collections Research Center (SCRC) to access and scan the alarmingly antisemitic letters cited and our file on the history of the collection. The Henry Miller Madden Papers, comprising nearly fifty archival boxes of manuscripts, photographs, and ephemera, had been left to the library with the stipulation that the collection remain sealed until 2007. The President announced this surprising, uncovered history the following week, stating: “The views attributed to Dr. Madden are more than allegations; they are reflections of his beliefs as captured in his own words, and in documents that he curated and donated to the Library before his passing.” With that statement, he began forming a Task Force to begin a semester of expedited research: he asked the Task Force to review every item in the collection to determine Madden’s views throughout his life.

In addition to a large Task Force of campus and community representatives, our Chair formed a Writing Subcommittee to conduct this comprehensive research. In addition to Dr. Hart, they appointed two History faculty, scholars on monuments and memory in the South who would involve their students in the research and several faculty from Jewish Studies, including a genocide scholar who would translate materials from German and Hungarian, and a Jewish community leader. As then-Associate Dean, I was asked to coordinate library staffing and collections access, a real challenge due to pandemic restrictions. Despite my administrative responsibilities, I begged to participate in the research and writing. I was convinced that this was a library story, and I wanted to explore what had made Madden a revered leader in our library and the profession, and how he had shaped our library. We divided up the work of requesting and reviewing materials, dividing up writing tasks, and bringing our findings together into a cohesive, 76-page report.

We learned that Henry Madden had espoused antisemitic, racist, and pro-Nazi views since his teens; had never expressed any change of heart; and knowingly curated the evidence we found in his personal papers that were donated to the library after his death. Some of Madden’s colleagues accepted our surprising findings. But many former colleagues and community members had difficulty...
reconciling our findings with the talented leader they knew, or felt we were judging Madden unfairly based on contemporary standards. Largely because of this response, we worked with Library Digital Services and SCRC teams to curate an online exhibition of key documents, photographs and drawings so that people could review the evidence themselves. A disturbing example is probably most valuable. In a February 12,1935 letter, Madden wrote:

The Jews: I am developing a violent and almost uncontrollable phobia against them. Whenever I see one of those predatory noses, or those raving and leering eyes, or those sobbering lips, or those flat feet, or those nasal and whiny voices I tremble with rage and hatred. They are the oppressors: they should be driven barefoot to some remote spot in Texas, ther [sic] to find shelter under the bushes, closed in by electrically charged barbed wire, with imported SA men stationed every ten yards apart, three men to each machine gun emplacement. Target practice will be permitted twice weekly, with explosive bullets to be used on Yom Kippur, Rob Hashanah, Purim, etc.... They must go!

Madden wrote about his hatred and Nazi sympathies throughout his life: in letters to friends during his degree programs at Stanford and Columbia, in letters to his mother during his post-WWII Foreign Service posting, in lecture notes when he taught History at Stanford, and in letters after he became Dean of the Library.

Madden’s original aspiration was to become a history professor, but in many ways, library leadership was an ideal outlet for his talents. He oversaw the library’s transformation to a large research collection, several major building projects, and the development of a dedicated library staff. Madden also continued his scholarship, focusing on German-language materials and bibliography. He was a storied anti-censorship campaigner as President of the California Library Association. Madden fostered loyalty and admiration from library staff, who led a campaign to name the library for him. The eventual naming of the Henry Madden Library shortly after his retirement actually required a change to CSU system-wide policy to accommodate naming a building for a living person. When Madden died in 1981, library staff conducted a sale of his personal book collections and effects to benefit a collections fund.

In retrospect, there were disturbing flipsides to most aspects of Madden’s legend as talented curmudgeon. For example, he built a significant collection of Western European materials by personally traveling to Europe every summer on collecting trips. In handwritten ledgers, correspondence, and oral interviews, we learned about the crates of items he shipped back from Europe. Successive eras of systemwide automation erased local acquisitions notes, but bookplates, stamps, and inscriptions raise questions about the provenance of some of these items. We know from historical student newspaper articles and administrative correspondence that Madden resisted a peaceful campaign by the Chicano Student Union to establish a Chicano Studies collection. There are many stories about Madden’s penchant for hiring staff with German last names. In his letters, he wrote openly to colleagues about his hatred of hiring non-white staff. Madden’s mark on the history and culture of the library will be difficult to reverse. Library Administration updated the website, stationary, and signage, but we are not resourced to reverse some aspects of Madden’s legacy. For now, the library is named Fresno State Library.

I’m grateful that I had the opportunity to participate in this process. Thanks to the generosity of colleagues. I learned a great deal about historical research. But this project made me think most about my MA in French in the age of deconstruction. Rather than looking for Truth, our efforts made me reflect again on what voices are available in the archive and who is left on the margin. Henry Madden still has fifty boxes of archival materials, and the people he hated don’t have the same record to return to. In Modiano’s novella Dora Bruder, a missing Jewish girl’s family returns to the archival records of the French Vichy government to uncover why she disappeared during the Holocaust. In an archive built by powerful antisemites, there are few traces that Dora Bruder ever lived. In libraries, people like Henry Madden built the collection and archive, and that will take time to undo.


From the Editor

Dear Safranim,

As I am writing this, I am preparing to go to ALA LibLearnX conference in Baltimore, where I will attend the Youth Media Awards and cheer, with our AJL colleagues, for the Sidney Taylor Book Awards winners. Yasher koach to them all!

For this issue, we have, in addition to our excellent reviews of children’s, young adult, and adult literature, two articles on experiences of antisemitism in our professional library communities. These sobering articles reveal that we have a great deal of work still to do in our profession.

On a brighter note, if you are a fan of historical fiction, you likely know the work of bestselling author Alyson Richman. In our newest Seven Questions With feature, you will learn about her work, her life, and her passions...in all, a wonderful read!

Wishing everyone warmth and light in these difficult times.

Sally
AJL Elections 2024

The nominating committee has presented the slate of officers for 2024-2026. Our constitution allows additional nominations to be made. Such nominations must have the support of five members in good standing, and be communicated to the chair of the nominating committee within two weeks of the publication date of this newsletter.

The election will be May 1-30, 2024. We will be voting by electronic ballot; all members in good standing are eligible to vote. If your email address has changed, please log into your account on the AJL website to update it BEFORE April 15. For membership assistance, contact Sharon Benamou, Vice-President for Membership. For election assistance, contact Joy Kingsolver.

Nominating Committee: Kathy Bloomfield (chair), Lenore Bell, Emily Bloomfield, Tina Weiss, Marcie Eskin, Joy Kingsolver.

AJL Slate of Officers, 2024-2026

Vice-President/President-Elect: Jackie Ben-Efraim

Jackie Ben-Efraim is originally from Washington, D.C. where she volunteered in the school library in lieu of gym class.

Jackie attended Columbia-JTS Joint program for undergraduate studies and also earned her library degree at Columbia University. During her studies, she interned at YIVO, organizing their clippings file which is similar to a collection at her current job.

In 2008 Jackie started work at American Jewish University as the Special Collections Librarian where she catalogs and mounts exhibits with materials in the Lowy-Winkler Family Rare Book Center in addition to overseeing digital collections.

Jackie has been an active member of AJL since her first day on the job at AJU. Jackie serves on the annual conference committee and manages ads in AJL’s publications. Currently she is the VP for Development.

Vice-President for Membership: Rebecca Levitan

Rebecca Levitan holds a BA in History and Judaic Studies from Binghamton University, and an MLIS from the University of Pittsburgh. She is a full time generalist librarian, and the Children’s Engagement Coordinator at the Pikesville Branch of the Baltimore County Public Library in Baltimore, MD. She is the current SSCPL president, a past Sydney Taylor Book Award committee member and chair, a co-editor for the Children’s and Young Adult reviews for AJL News and Reviews, and the AJL Seals Manager. She is also a member of the ‘23-‘25 ALSC Notable Children’s Books Committee. As a mom of three young children with her husband, AJL Treasurer Andrew Lillien, she is passionate about quality Jewish children’s literature. Rebecca is a voracious romance novel reader and is an avid knitter and can often be found working on a shawl that she will likely not wear because it is too warm in Baltimore most of the year.

Vice-President for Development: Hannah Srour-Zackon

Hannah Srour-Zackon is the archivist at Congregation Shaar Hashomayim in Montreal, Quebec. Hannah received her bachelor’s degree in Jewish Studies and English Literature from McGill University, and her Master of Information (with a focus in archives and book history) from the University of Toronto. Since receiving the AJL Student Scholarship in 2019, Hannah has been an active AJL member. She is currently co-editing an upcoming issue of Judaica Librarianship devoted to both library and archival collections in Canada, in addition to serving on several AJL committees including the executive board of AJL-Canada, the Jewish Fiction Award committee, the Education committee, the Student Scholarship committee, and the conference committee. Outside of her passion for bringing more people in contact with the rich histories of Canadian Jewry through archives, she is the book columnist for the Canadian Jewish News.

Secretary: Gabriel Mordoch

Gabriel Mordoch has been serving as the Irving M. Hermelin Curator of Judaica at the University of Michigan Library since 2019. He received his PhD in Studies of the Portuguese Speaking-World from the Ohio State University (2017) and his master’s degree in Jewish Languages from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2011). His bachelor’s degree in Hebrew is from the University of São Paulo, Brazil (2006).

Treasurer: Andrew Lillien

Andrew Lillien holds a BS in math and has worked as a data analyst for the past ten years. He is an enthusiast of Judaism and books, and is looking forward to working as the AJL treasurer. He is a father of three young children and an avid gamer of all kinds — and is married to the single best board member, Rebecca Levitan.
Research Libraries, Archives, and Special Collections Division

RAS President: Eitan Kensky

Eitan Kensky is the Reinhard Family Curator of Judaica and Hebraica at Stanford Libraries. Before that, he spent an enriching three years at the Yiddish Book Center as the director of collections initiatives, working on translation projects and expanding digital collections. He has previously served as AJL Secretary and RAS VP.

RAS Vice-President: Rachel Ariel

Born and raised in Israel, Rachel Ariel studied History, Political Science and Education at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Jewish Studies at the Hebrew College in Boston. Upon coming to North Carolina in 1994, Rachel became one of the two first teachers at the newly founded Jewish Community Day School of Durham-Chapel Hill (The Lerner School). She taught Jewish studies and Hebrew and served as Director of Jewish Studies and as an interim Head of School.

Since 2006 Rachel has been the Subject Librarian for Jewish and Israel Studies at Duke University Libraries. She has curated two exhibits at Duke Libraries; “Illustrating the Hebrew Bible” (2010) and “Capturing the Moment: Centuries of the Passover Haggadah” (2016).

Rachel has been a member of the Association of Jewish Libraries since 2007. She participated in all, but three, AJL conferences since then and presented four papers. Rachel served as a member of the RAS Reference and Bibliography Awards Committee and has been the secretary of the AJL Conference Planning Committee since 2020.

Schools, Synagogues, Centers, and Public Libraries Division

SSCPL President: Aviva Rosenberg

Aviva Rosenberg is the Youth Services Librarian at the Ridgefield Free Public Library in Ridgefield, NJ. She previously served as school media specialist at The Moriah School in Englewood, NJ, and Talmudical Academy in Baltimore, MD. She received her BA in History from Stern College and her MLS from Southern Connecticut State University. Aviva has been on the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee since 2021, serving as chair in 2024. She lives in Passaic, NJ with her husband and four children, where she spends her non-reading time baking and providing reader’s advisory to strangers on the internet.

SSCPL Vice-President: Sarah Feldman

Sarah Feldman is the co-chair of the New England chapter of AJL, which she revived 4 years ago, and has been serving on the AJL Fiction Awards committee since 2022. Sarah is the Library Media Specialist at Gann Academy, a Jewish high school in Greater Boston. Sarah is originally from London and during her career she has worked in both public and private schools in England and America and is a certified teacher on both sides of the Atlantic. Before qualifying as a Library Media Specialist, Sarah worked as a book editor for trade and educational publishers in London and New York, including memorable stints at the Guinness Book of Records (UK) and at Behrman House Publishers (USA). Sarah is also active in school librarian organizations in Massachusetts and is the editor of the Spotlight feature for the Massachusetts School Library Association. Sarah obtained a Master’s in Information Science from the State University of New York at Albany, an undergraduate degree in English Literature from the University of Sussex, UK and a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education from Sheffield Hallam University, UK. Sarah has three young adult children who are all avid readers and are tolerant of their mother’s passion for visiting libraries at home and abroad!

Sydney Taylor Book Award Winners

Winners of the annual Sydney Taylor Book Award were announced by the Association of Jewish Libraries on Monday, January 22, 2024, in a virtual livecast at the Youth Media Awards announcement at the American Library Association. Named in memory of Sydney Taylor, author of the classic All-of-a-Kind Family series, the award recognizes books for children and teens that exemplify high literary standards while authentically portraying the Jewish experience.

GOLD MEDALISTS

Two New Years by Richard Ho, illustrated by Lynn Scurfield, published by Chronicle Books, is the winner in the Picture Book category. Follow a Chinese Jewish family as they celebrate not one, but two new years: Rosh Hashanah in fall, and Lunar New Year in early spring. With warm illustrations that evoke the paper cutting traditions of both cultures, this thoughtful look at the two celebrations is full of joy and light.

The Dubious Pranks of Shaindy Goodman by Mari Lowe,
an Arthur A. Levine book, published by Levine Querido, is the winner in the Middle Grade category. Lonely preteen Shaindy is lured into assisting popular Gayil with a series of pranks targeting students in their all-girls Orthodox Jewish middle school. But as the consequences escalate, Shaindy must decide whether fitting in is worth the cost to her classmates—and herself. A subtly thrilling story of friendship, consequences, and forgiveness.

_The Blood Years_ by Elana K. Arnold, published by Balzer+Bray, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, is the winner in the Young Adult category. Growing up in Czernowitz with a protective grandfather and an unstable mother, thirteen-year old Frederieke (Rieke) Teitler and her older sister Astra struggle to survive when war breaks out and their beloved community is invaded by the Russian and German armies. Inspired by the author’s grandmother’s experience in Holocaust-era Romania.

**SILVER MEDALISTS**

Eleven Sydney Taylor Honor Books were recognized.

For Picture Books, the Honor Books are _Afikomen_ by Tziporah Cohen, illustrated by Yaara Eshet, published by Groundwood Books; _Hanukkah Upside Down_ by Elissa Brent Weissman, illustrated by Omer Hoffmann, published by Abrams Books for Young Readers, an imprint of ABRAMS; and _Hidden Hope: How a Toy and a Hero Saved Lives During the Holocaust_ by Elisa Boxer, illustrated by AmyJune Bates, published by Abrams Books for Young Readers, an imprint of ABRAMS.


In addition to the medal winners, the Award Committee designated three Notable Books of Jewish Content for 2024.

The Notable Picture Books are _The Rabbi and His Donkey_ by Susan Tarcov, illustrated by Diana Renjina, published by Kar-Ben, an imprint of Lerner Publishing Group; and _Zhen Yu and the Snake_ by Erica Lyons, illustrated by Renia Metallinou, published by Kar-Ben, an imprint of Lerner Publishing Group.

The Notable Middle Grade Book is _The Witch of Woodland_ by Laurel Snyder, published by Walden Pond Press, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

More information about the Sydney Taylor Book Award, a complete listing of the award winners and notables, and seals for purchase can be found at www.sydneytaylorbookawards.org.

**SYDNEY TAYLOR BODY-OF-WORK AWARD**

The Sydney Taylor Body-of-Work Award, which recognizes an author or entity who has made a substantial contribution over time to the genre of Jewish children’s literature, goes to Joni Sussman. As publisher at Kar-Ben Publishing, an imprint of the Lerner Publishing Group, for the last twenty years, Joni has greatly increased the reach of Jewish children’s literature by producing a significant number of high-quality titles on an ever-expanding variety of Jewish topics. Her efforts have put Jewish books in the eyes of the public and the hands of children on a new scale.

**SYDNEY TAYLOR MANUSCRIPT AWARD**

The 2024 Winner for the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award is Marlaina Docktore for _Aa’s Golem_, a contemporary middle grade fantasy told in two voices. Ava Lowe creates a golem named Joseph to help her deal with antisemitic incidents in her life and community, but Joseph also tells his own story. Contemporary topics of friendship, family dynamics, neurodiversity, antisemitism, and social dynamics are integrated into the story of the teenaged golem who helps Ava and her friends realize that working together is the best way to solve problems.

**EVENTS**

Winning authors and illustrators will receive their awards at the annual conference of the Association of Jewish Libraries, to be held at the Holiday Inn San Diego Bayside in San Diego, California, from June 24 to 26, 2024. Gold and silver medalists will participate in a blog tour from February 5 to 9, 2024. For more information about the blog tour, please visit www.sydneytaylorbookawards.org. For an exclusive interview with the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee chair, please visit The Book of Life Podcast at www.bookoflifepodcast.com.

**COMMITTEES**

Members of the 2024 Sydney Taylor Book Award committee are Chair Aviva Rosenberg, Ridgefield Free Public Library, Ridgefield, New Jersey; Nat Bension, JCC of Greater Ann Arbor, Michigan; Debra S. Gold, Cuyahoga County Public Library, retired, Beachwood, Ohio; Dr. Annette Y. Goldsmith, Sephardic Temple Tifereth Israel Levy Library, Los Angeles; Eytan Kessler, East Hampton Library, Patchogue, New York; Melanie Koss, Northern Illinois University, Chicago; and Arielle Vishny, author, New York.

Members of the 2024 Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award committee are Chair Aileen Grossberg, Congregation Shomrei Emunah, Montclair, New Jersey, and Ohev Shalom Congregation, South Orange, New Jersey; Ilka Gordon, Title 1 instructor, Beachwood,
James McBride is the winner of the Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) Jewish Fiction Award for his novel *The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store*, published by Riverhead Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC. The award includes a $1,000 cash prize and an invitation to attend the 2024 conference of the Association of Jewish Libraries, June 24-26, in San Diego, California. Two other honor books have been recognized: *Kantika* by Elizabeth Graver, published by Metropolitan Books, an imprint of Henry Holt and Company; and *Once We Were Home* by Jennifer Rosner, published by Flatiron Books, an imprint of Macmillan Publishers. The Committee reviewed over 70 works of fiction originally written in or translated into English with significant Jewish thematic content published in the United States in 2023. Thanks to all those who submitted entries for consideration. The wide array of books published in 2023 is a testament to the vibrant state of contemporary Jewish fiction.

Set in the 1930s, James McBride’s *The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store* immerses its readers in the Chicken Hill neighborhood of Pottstown, Pennsylvania, home to Jewish, Italian, and Black Americans and immigrants. The heart of the neighborhood is the titular grocery store, run by free-thinking Chona Ludlow. When a deaf Black orphan is being hunted by white authorities who want to institutionalize him, Chona and her husband, Moshe, a nightclub owner who has recently integrated his club to appeal to the Black community, provide a refuge. The ramifications of this concealment spiral out from the store into the community and through the years.

“The unflinching descriptions of the hardships faced by the Chicken Hill residents are tempered by moments of humor and acts of compassion and reconciliation,” says committee chair Paula Breger. “James McBride has woven a vibrant tapestry of pre-World War II life and the struggle for survival by those on the margins of society. *The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store* is at once a searing commentary on injustice in America and a celebration of community, the power of love and friendship, and tikkun olam, repairing the world.”

*Kantika* (the Ladino word for “song”) tells the story of Rebecca Cohen, born into a well-to-do Sephardic family in Constantinople at the turn of the twentieth century. Following a change in fortunes for both her family and the city’s Jews, Rebecca must leave her home. Thus begins a continuous cycle of displacement and migration, a journey which leads her through Spain and Cuba and, eventually, to America. Yet, throughout it all, Rebecca remains strong, coming into her own as a Sephardic Jewish woman—cementing her as an enduring heroine in Jewish literature.

Drawing inspiration from the life of author Elizabeth Graver’s own grandmother, the novel is incredibly intimate, with each chapter featuring photographs from the real Rebecca’s life. Graver imagines the complex inner life of her grandmother which exists behind each moment frozen in time. “Above all,” says committee member Hannah Srour-Zackon, “*Kantika* is an evocative exploration of cultural inheritances across generations, in particular Sephardic Jewish culture and its ability to endure through familial bonds, even when removed from physical location.”

Jennifer Rosner shares the stories of Roger, Ana, and Oskar, Jewish children hidden during the Holocaust, primarily through the lens of their lives after the war, when they are forcibly extracted from their adopted homes and settled—through trials physical, emotional, and spiritual—in Israel.

“Rosner has crafted an exquisite exploration of themes of belonging, home, and the long-term effects of wartime and displacement,” notes committee member Rena Citrin. Based upon the true stories of the many Jewish children hidden and later reclaimed, *Once We Were Home* raises poignant questions of identity, good intentions, and unforeseen consequences, as well as what it really means to find home.

The AJL Jewish Fiction Award Committee members are Paula Breger, Temple Emanu-El, Haverhill, Massachusetts; Rena Citrin, Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Day School (retired), Chicago, Illinois; Sarah Feldman, Gann Academy, Waltham, Massachusetts; Dina Herbert, AJL past president, Alexandria, Virginia; and Hannah Srour-Zackon, Congregation Shaar Hashomayim, Montreal, Quebec.

The Association of Jewish Libraries gratefully acknowledges the generous support of Dan Wyman Books for underwriting the Award. Submissions for the 2025 AJL Fiction Award (titles published in 2024) are now being accepted. For more information, please visit http://www.jewishlibraries.org/jewish-fiction-award.
IN THE SPOTLIGHT
EDITED BY REBECCA LEVITAN AND JUDY EHERNSTEIN


Twelve-year-old Shaindy Goodman longs to have a circle of friends but for whatever reason, this never seems to happen. Then the new school year starts and Gayil, the most popular girl who happens to live next door decides that this is the year Shaindy deserves her attention, but only for one-on-one activities outside of school hours. They skate together, Gayil graceful in her Heelys and Shaindy cautious of school hours. They skate together, Gayil directs and calls harmless pranks on classmates, which Gayil sets up and Shaindy cautious of school hours. Soon they are sneaking into school after hours to set up pranks on classmates, which Gayil directs and calls harmless.

Shaindy believes they must be harmless, as Gayil is the girl everyone wants to be, the perfect Bais Yaakov girl. But they aren’t less. Shaindy believes they must be harmless, as Gayil is the girl everyone wants to be, the perfect Bais Yaakov girl. But they aren’t random pranks on classmates, but something more sinister, calculated, and are far from harmless. No one is laughing. Gayil has a grudge, a deep hurt and Shaindy finds herself at the center of it.

As Yom Kippur approaches, a teacher offers a novel approach to set up pranks on classmates, which Gayil directs and calls harmless. A teacher offers a novel approach to set up pranks on classmates, which Gayil directs and calls harmless.

This is a powerful book for all readers, in all kinds of libraries. The close-knit Orthodox community setting might at first seem alien to non-Orthodox and non-Jewish readers, but this is a book about trauma, seeking and rewarding perfection, and relational aggression, topics all readers can relate to. Shaindy’s road to seeing the true Gayil is not smooth and is not without pain, but in the end, truth rules the day.

**Judy Ehrenstein,** Children’s Librarian, Montgomery County Public Libraries, Bethesda, MD, Co-Editor, AJL News and Reviews, Children’s and Young Adult Reviews

Editor’s Note: The Dubious Pranks of Shaindy Goodman was awarded the 2024 Sydney Taylor Book Award Gold Medal for Middle Grade Fiction.

BIBLE STORIES


Originally published in Hebrew, Ronit Chachman, an Israeli author, has written a very creative story based on a short Biblical text. Nuri is a young man who visits the sea every day, eats some bread, then throws a piece into the water. His father has told him “cast your bread on the water,” but Nuri does not remember the rest of the sentence. With every passing day, one small fish grows bigger and bigger from Nuri’s bread. One day, Nuri falls into the water and is swallowed by the oversized fish and taken to the ocean floor. Here, he is greeted by the King of the Sea, Wisewhale, who explains to Nuri the importance of the phrase told to him by his father: it is a lesson in generosity and giving to others.

Divided into four chapters and an epilogue, the text is beautifully typeset amongst colorful illustrations by award-winning Israeli illustrator Moran Yogev, who also illustrated The Very Best Sukkah: A Story from Uganda, a Sydney Taylor Honor Book. Yogev’s brilliant tones of blue, orange, green, yellow, and brown not only demonstrate her excellent artistic abilities, but successfully complement the story. Each page is bordered with floral designs matching the eye-catching color palette of the book. A main feature found within the book is the beautifully scripted quote, written in Hebrew, from K obelet (Ecclesiastes) 11:1: “Cast your bread on the water and one day it will come back to you.”

Though only 32 pages, Ronit Chachman has written a remarkable and unique tale, cleverly divided into chapters. This is a great way to introduce young readers to the chapter book format. Since Nuri and the Whale focuses on Hebrew Biblical text, the book is appropriate for a synagogue or Jewish library where further explanation of the text can spark discussion and initiate questions about the mitzvah of tzedakah.

**Mimi Leyton,** Volunteer at Greenberg Families Library, Ottawa, ON, Canada

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advised, “And if not now, then when?” Everyone should not delay extending the invitation because Rabbi Hillel did not invite their two newest neighbors. They know that they have a fantastic time when sister Russi remembers that they turn to Rabbi Hillel’s famous words, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?” to figure out how to turn a gloomy day into a fun one. Told in rhyming couplets, the siblings create a carnival in their basement complete with games, prizes and entertainment. Soon big brother Nussi realizes that more people can have fun if they invite all the kids on their block because, “And if I am only for myself, what am I?” Everyone is having a fantastic time when sister Russi remembers that they should not delay extending the invitation because Rabbi Hillel advised, “And if not now, then when?”

Yossi & Nussi’s Rainy Day Dare is a sweet look at how children can take agency for their own activities in the face of the dreaded “b word” — boredom. The mom in the story encourages independence and creativity in her children without being didactic. The family modeled is clearly observant, with yarmulkes and tzitzes on the boys, dresses on the girls, and the mom has a head covering. However, the message of this appealing picture book is universal. The illustrations by Yocheved Nadell are colorful but uninspired. This volume is a welcome addition to any school, synagogue or family library.

**Rena Citrin, Retired Day School Librarian, Current member of the AJL Fiction Award Committee**


A perek from Pirkei Avos (Lessons of Our Fathers) as the foundation for Yossi & Nussi’s Rainy Day Dare. When the Stein family children, Yossi, Nussi, Russi and Bassi, are stuck at home on a rainy day, they turn to Rabbi Hillel’s famous words, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?” to figure out how to turn a gloomy day into a fun one. Told in rhyming couplets, the siblings create a carnival in their basement complete with games, prizes and entertainment. Soon big brother Nussi realizes that more people can have fun if they invite all the kids on their block because, “And if I am only for myself, what am I?” Everyone is having a fantastic time when sister Russi remembers that they should not delay extending the invitation because Rabbi Hillel advised, “And if not now, then when?”

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**Rena Citrin, Retired Day School Librarian, Current member of the AJL Fiction Award Committee**


The stories of fourteen Biblical personalities — from Eve to Esther— are told with a focus on the distinctive personality traits of each, the values they lived by, and what we can learn from them. In Abraham’s story, “Trust the Journey,” we learn that Abraham needed answers to many questions, so he started walking to find those answers. In Miriam’s tale, “Take Care,” we see how Miriam guarded her brother, Moses. In Esther’s chapter, “Change and Grow,” she realizes that she will have to stretch to meet the moment and save her people. Besides the individual pages for each person, the back of the book contains additional information about each one. The stories are concise but cover the key events of each of their lives.

What really makes this book amazing is the clever, unique, and joyous illustrations of each character. Using art made from found objects, each personality is composed of a multitude of bits and pieces that make for a fun search for why those items were used. For example, Sarah, “Laugh Yourself Silly,” has chattering teeth for eyes, jingle bells for her mouth, and hand-clappers for her arms. The reader can’t help smiling. There is lots to read, explore, and learn in this fun retelling of Bible stories. This title is highly recommended for all libraries with Bible story collections.

**Kathy Bloomfield, AJL Immediate Past President, Seal Beach, CA**


A delightful new romp of a Bible story expands the childhood of King David. Embroidering on the exciting account in I Samuel, the author imagines young David’s lonely days herding sheep as preparation for his adult success. She combines boring and brave in a refreshing tale that never flags. Illustrations and text are humorous and full of pep. When the sheep do not laugh at his jokes or play games, David learns to play a harp, to sing, to write songs, all to occupy his boring days which are suddenly interrupted by a lamb stealing lion. David throws a rock to stop the predator: In vain! His father explains he needs more; he gives him a slingshot. Now the empty days are full of practice; he perfects his skills. When the lion returns David routs him with his sling stones; he understands he can be a protector. Time passes; the story book now follows the Bible. Israel, ruled by King Saul, is at war with the Philistines whose secret weapon is Goliath the giant. This giant dares any man to fight him; frightened, all refuse. David steps up. His brothers say he should not. Saul exclaims David is just a boy he cannot; David says he can. Saul gives David his armor; he rejects it. He meets the giant with only his slingshot. A stone hits the giant in his forehead; it kills him. Unlike the Bible, here David does not behead Goliath. The story ends with hero David’s career with Jonathan and Saul; he follows Saul as king. Becoming a strong king takes practice, once again David does. He reigns successfully founding a new city, dreaming of a new Temple. A short end note explains David’s historical footprint. The book’s

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last word is about practicing.

Despite the shape of the traditional Little Golden Books, the vocabulary is strong, and text is longer. This volume is recommended for synagogue and religious school libraries.

Ellen G. Cole,
Retired Librarian,
Temple Isaiah, Los Angeles, CA

FICTION - MIDDLE GRADE


Based on experiences from the author’s life, this graphic novel illustrates the story of Mia whose mother is Jewish, and whose father is a Native American of the Muscogee tribe. Her parents divorced when she was three, after which she and her mom left Oklahoma to live in southern California. Her mother has remarried, Mia attends Jewish Day School, and they are all living a traditional Jewish life (they appear to be denominationally Conservative Jews). Her mother still has deep resentments of her former husband and will not talk to or about him. The book opens with Mia being ridiculed by her classmates for looking “different.” When she explains that she is Native American, she is subjected to several stereotypical questions and slurs. Seeking more information about her Indigenous background, she takes a book out of the school library, Little Indian Girl, the story of a pioneer girl who is kidnapped by Native Americans who are depicted as evil or inhuman. All of this is followed by a Shabbat dinner where her Rabbi, a guest, mentions that without her that night, she would just be running around like wild Indians.

Mia decides to visit her father in Oklahoma. She does not discuss this with her mom, rather she uses the guise of a sleep-over Shabbaton and help from her best friend to sneak away, get on a bus, and see her dad. In Oklahoma, Mia attends a Powwow, learns a lot about her Indigenous culture and history including government boarding schools. Of course, inevitably her mother finds out where she is, flies to Oklahoma, brings her home, and grounds her. As part of her punishment, Mia must study with her rabbi, and they explore the book of Jonah. After some deep thought, Mia ends up teaching the rabbi a few things, most especially that she is a person with two distinct traditions neither of which should be overlooked or turned into a punch line. Ultimately, Mia’s mom invites Mia’s father and his family to visit for a weekend in southern California. At Shabbat dinner, the families resolve to see each other more often and to learn from each other.

This is a book with a unique perspective. While the Jewish focus is traditional (Mia is Jewish because her mother is Jewish, the family keeps kosher), the concept of having multiple cultural identities in a mixed faith family is becoming increasingly more commonplace. Books like this provide needed insight.

Highly recommended for all libraries, especially those with mixed faith families.

Kathy Bloomfield,
AJL Immediate Past President,
Seal Beach, CA


Here is a story in the tradition of “The Parent Trap,” with a whole lot of Yiddish and Yiddishkeit. Jordan’s book is set circa 1950, in an imaginary town that seems to be between Manhattan and the Borscht Belt. Two girls born on the same day, in the same hospital, cross paths 12 years later. Shira Epstein is the rabbi’s motherless daughter (her mother died the day after her birth); she longs to be on the stage, not the bimah. Esther Rosenbaum is raised by a theater-star mother, never knowing her father. Fanny wants her daughter to follow her performing footsteps, but Esther years to study Torah. They weren’t switched at birth, but readers soon realize that Esther’s father is Shira’s maternal uncle, who left town after his sister died, not knowing the love of his life, red-haired Red-Hot Fanny (yes, a name with a PG-13 rating, like the character), was pregnant. And each girl dreams of something different than their parent’s hopes for them.

The plot sometimes stretches credulity and is a bit complicated, with an omniscient narrator (revealed as Morty the deli man) doing his best to sort things out. The girls are brought together by Benny, part of The Heights Theater family and bellhop at Scheinfeld’s Resort, and they switch places so that Shira, coached by Fanny, can try out for a TV talent contest, and Esther, tutored by Rabbi Epstein, can be a bat mitzvah.

The book is divided into overture, three acts, and a curtain call glossary. The two girls support each other and wind up together both on stage and at the bimah, successful in saving the about-to-be-torn-down theater, leyning (reading Torah) and commenting on honoring one’s mother and father.

Jewish readers and theater kids will most appreciate this charming but sometimes confusing book, and public and middle school libraries with Jewish patrons, and synagogue and Jewish school libraries are where it will do best. It offers a glimpse into Yiddish theater and early television variety shows, but if it were contemporary, Shira and Esther would be a hit on America’s Got Talent.

Carla Kozak,
Retired Children’s Librarian,
San Francisco

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Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens


Former BFFs Maddie and Chloe wind up at the same theater camp during the summer between 7th and 8th grades. Chapters alternate between the two narrators, sometimes in flashback, giving readers a history of the friendship, why it soured, and how the two are handling their unexpected close proximity.

Maddie is a self-described “chubby Jewish girl with thick glasses.” She has two supportive, loving moms, and dyspraxia, which renders her clumsy and accident-prone. Maddie knows girls like her don’t get starring roles, but she’s at camp for the screenwriting program. Chloe, a pretty redhead, has talent and drive. She starred in a popular kids’ TV series, now canceled, and being too old for child roles but too young to play teens, her only recent work is an embarrassing commercial for menstrual cramp medication. She’s eager to shine on the camp stage, and glad to have a month away from the controlling management of her mother. Maddie’s topic for developing a screenplay is London in the 1800s, and she decides to set a golem story there. Her protagonist will be a girl golem, strong and brave. When her instructor asks what the character wants, Maddie replies, “respect,” but it takes her a while to differentiate respect from revenge, both in her screenplay, and in dealing with Chloe. Chloe, playing Galinda in Wicked, is getting close to Sasha, who plays Elphaba. Chloe downplays the talents of most of the camp kids, but she respects Sasha, who is mature, kind, and a skilled actress. Sasha bemoans the lack of roles for “a chubby, Mexican-Jewish girl,” but three days before the performance, she leaves to star in a movie. Chloe and Sasha reveal their mutual crushes, share a sweet kiss, and are eager to keep their friendship going. Understudy Maddie, who didn’t want to be onstage, is preparing to co-star with Chloe in the ultimate BFF roles, supporting each other for the sake of the play, and because they realize they are better as friends than enemies.

Two characters briefly identifying as Jewish (three if one counts the golem) is the total of Jewishness in Second Chance Summer. A good theater-kids and friendship book, covering several aspects of each issue, it’s best for public or school libraries.

**Carla Kozak,**
*Retired Children’s Librarian, San Francisco*


Shai is a twelve-year-old girl who has recently moved with her parents and younger sister, Gili, from Israel to San Diego. Shai is miserable and wants things to stay as they were. She misses everything about her life in Israel, especially her friends and her grandparents. Her six-year-old sister seems to be adjusting better than Shai; Gili is learning English faster, while Shai struggles with the English language and its odd phrases. Once Shai starts at her new school and begins to make friends, she will have to find a positive balance between her Israeli culture and her new life in California. Before she can feel comfortable in her new environment, Shai must learn to navigate the many hurdles associated with relocation and adapting to a new culture. Her life in Israel seemed easier and familiar — from the food to the completely Jewish environment. Shai is proud to be an Israeli and proud of her Jewish heritage. When a student in Shai’s class makes antisemitic comments, Shai becomes conflicted about openly wearing her Star of David necklace. However, as Shai becomes more accepting of life in San Diego, she realizes the importance of friends who respect each other, despite differences in language, culture, and religion. It’s when Shai is faced with a personal tragedy that she must reconcile her feelings about her birthplace and her new home. Only then can Shai accept that her heart might belong in two places at the same time. Noa Nimrodi addresses timely and age-appropriate themes of adapting to a new environment, learning the English language, making new friends, and overcoming differences. At times comical and at times emotional, the author successfully captures the experiences of a 12-year-old girl trying to balance between her Israeli way of life and a new culture. This heartwarming novel would be an asset to both public and Jewish libraries.

**Mimi Leyton,**
*Volunteer at Greenberg Families Library, Ottawa, ON, Canada*

Editor’s Note: Not So Shy was named a 2024 Sydney Taylor Book Awards Middle Grade Honor Book.

**Fiction - Teen Readers**

Bergman, Rich. Ricardo’s Extraordinary Journey: A Boy’s Mystical Quest for Fame, Fortune and Adventure. Richard B. Bergman, 2019, 322 pp. $11.95 (9780990335221) PBK. Gr. 6 and up.

Young Ricardo leaves his native Madrid to travel all over the known world — Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East (including a stop in Jerusalem). On the way he encounters tribal chiefs, Arab merchants, holy men, slave traders, and

*Parallel Lines* is the story of three teenage girls, Nour, Rivki, and Tamar, whose only connection is that they all ride the same light rail through Jerusalem. Taking place in 2015, during a time of tumult in Israel regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, all three girls try to figure out their place in the greater Israeli ecosystem. Nour is a Palestinian living in East Jerusalem, whose brother gets involved in anti-Israel activities and is jailed. She spends time with her cousin Fadwa who invites her to a “peaceful revolt,” where Nour is ultimately injured in the ensuing melee. She begins to question her place in the conflict and what she can do to make her place in Israeli society. Rivki, an ultra-Orthodox girl, forced to spend time with a secular crowd while in the hospital with Crohn’s disease, begins to question her place as a religious woman, secluded from secular society. She feels that her role in her family has changed with her sister’s engagement and wedding and goes in search of her future. Tamar, a secular girl, accidently witnesses a violent interaction between a peer and an innocent Palestinian shop owner. She is forced to take a side in the conflict that angers her friends, while also beginning to date an Arab boy. Her place in her school is challenging due to the politics of the community. All three girls are strangers, until one night they meet in an act of heroism to prevent a terrorist attack. Through their bravery, they are able to save an elderly gentleman and prevent a much bigger attack from occurring. The girls are lauded by the Israeli government and given a special ceremony in their honor. The climax of the story takes place too close to the end of the book, and would have been better placed within the story.

A very timely story on the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this book is recommended for young adults and is appropriate for school and public libraries.

Laura Schutzman, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY, AJL Publications Chair, Adult Review Co-Editor AJL News & Reviews


Rose Berman is just trying to get through senior year, dealing with her anxiety as well as she can with therapy and Prozac. Some of her classmates, though, love to remind her that last year, she had a full-blown panic attack and had to be escorted out of calculus class. One of the football players takes particular delight in tormenting her, calling her “Psycho” while attempting to sexually assault her at a party. Her neighbor (and host of the party) Elliot unexpectedly comes to her rescue, but her anxiety takes a turn for the worse. Her therapist suggests she try boxing. Hoping to take back some control over her life, she starts lessons at Midtown Gym, where coincidentally Elliot also trains. Behind the facade of a hard-partying drug user he presents to the world, Rose learns that he is charming and cares more than anyone would guess. She also discovers that he is part of an underground fight club that uses Midtown Ring as one of its bases. As she gets more involved with Elliot and the fight scene, she will either lose herself completely or tap into a strength she never thought she had.

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This contemporary novel squarely addresses topics of mental illness, teen sexuality, and family conflict. In addition to Rose's mental health struggle, it is revealed that her mother died by suicide, an event that left Rose wondering just how much she was like mother, and what that could mean. Rose is also openly bisexual. Gemma, Rose's best friend and one-time (brief) romantic interest, is in a developing relationship with another girl, something she is afraid to reveal to her own parents. Elliot's father is controlling and abusive, willing to sacrifice his son's health and happiness to further his own ends.

Rose's Jewish faith is suggested in passing moments: making "a silent prayer in Hebrew" before opening a worry-inducing text message, noting a too-small skirt was last worn at her Bat Mitzvah, and telling Elliot that it had been important to her mother that Rose be raised Jewish, so her father tries his best. Other than these brief mentions, Judaism plays little role in the story. With its frank approach to violence, drug use, and sexuality, this book is recommended for high schools and public library teen collections.

Beth Gallego
Children's Librarian,
Los Angeles Public Library
Los Angeles, CA


*This Dark Descent* is a high fantasy novel joining the trend of golem novels. Veradell, the capital city of Enderlain, is ruled by cruel nobles while the equally cruel royals wage a never-ending war against surrounding countries. The city's people struggle to survive as the royalty and nobility hoard "verillion," the magical plant that powers everything from lamps to ice boxes. Amid this, Mikira Rusel supports her family by competing in illegal races on her favorite horse from her family's ranch of enchanted horses, blaming herself for the misfortunes which led to a decline in their buyers. When Rezek Kelba, son of one of the city's four great noble houses, has his father arrested for practicing enchantment without a license rather than only breeding already-enchanted horses, Mikira makes a deal with Rezek: if she wins the city's brutal horse race, her father will be released. But she can't use an enchanted horse, which means she stands no chance. However, she meets Damien Adair, son of a lesser noble house, who makes a deal with her — he will sponsor her in the race and procure an undetectable enchanted horse, and she can keep the prize money while he takes the king's boon that comes along with it. Mikira doesn't know that Damien also made a deal with Arielle Kadar, a Kinnish woman who secretly creates golem animals using forbidden Kinnish magic. She will craft a horse golem to help Mikira win, and in return Damien will get her an enchanter's license. Arielle is also running from demons in her past, after her first attempt at a golem killed her beloved Saba. Both women join Damien and his close friend Reid at the Adair manor to prepare for the race. But intrigue abounds, and no one's loyalty can be trusted as nobles vie for the upper hand. Mikira and Arielle begin wondering if the opportunity they hoped would grant them freedom might have entrapped them as pawns in this game played by the nobles, even as they find themselves beginning to understand and care about Damien, Reid, and Damien's sister Shira. The book ends on a major cliffhanger as Arielle's growing powers threaten her own safety. The last few chapters set the stage for the rebels to free the people of Enderlain from the nobles' tyranny, and readers will be left chomping at the bit for the release of the second book. While the tradition of the golem comes from Ashkenazic heritage, the Kinnish people — the fantasy version of the Jewish people — are coded Sephardic. The religions of Kinnism and Sendism are clearly a reference to Judaism and Christianity, with Sendism adding to Kinnism's beliefs about the origin of magic from four Harbingers with the belief that the Goddess Sendia sent the Harbingers to bring magic to humanity. Though the details of the religions do not parallel the religions of our world, the dynamic between the two does. In addition to Jewish legend, the novel centers themes of classism via the brewing rebellion due to the nobles' cruelty. The novel is also queer-normative, featuring a bisexual plotline and several minor characters using they/them pronouns without fanfare. There is lots of bloodshed, though not overwhelming or overly gory, and sexual encounters take place off-screen. *This Dark Descent* is highly recommended for libraries serving older teens.

Dainy Bernstein,
Postdoctoral Research Associate,
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign


Olivia has a whole plan of what she wants to do the summer before she starts her senior year of high school, work on her college essays, study for the SATs, and work on her science project on cardiology. Nowhere in her plan does a cruise with her family fit in. However, she is forced to go on the trip with her parents and twin younger brothers, Matt and Justin. While on board she meets Sebastian, another teenager just there to have fun with his friends. Over the course of the trip, they become closer and develop feelings for each other. However,
there is a wedge keeping them apart: Logan. Logan was Olivia’s older brother, who supposedly died of a heart condition, who always encouraged her to follow her path. One of the places that Logan wanted to go with Olivia was Antigua and she planned to visit Antigua as part of the cruise and invites Sebastian along. Also, on the cruise is an old family friend, Jules. Jules tells Olivia information that changes her perspective of Sebastian, and especially the death of her brother Logan. Olivia hoped that by going to visit Antigua as part of the cruise and invites Sebastian along. Logan wanted to go with Olivia was Antigua and she planned to kill him if they knew he was a vampire. Through a series of misunderstandings and lack of communication, the two brothers wind up in grave danger, and Luis’s sister Alejandra is almost killed by the vampire-hunter. But in the end, the vampires’ true nature of healing via blood magic is revealed to the mortals, the vampire-hunter is arrested, and the vampires get the opportunity to live alongside a few mortals who know what they are, with a glimmer of hope that mortals will stop hating vampires based on centuries-long prejudice and misunderstanding.

Despite the obvious presence of blood, *Don’t Want to Be Your Monster* is heartwarming and often funny. The characters are all unique and lovable, even Victor when he’s at his most insufferable. Told from both boys’ perspectives, the story explores the effects of personal and cultural trauma as well as sibling dynamics and teenage angst. Moulton skillfully makes clear their premise for the book as an antidote to the antisemitic origins of the popular vampire figure without coming across heavy-handed. The characters come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, including Eastern European Jewish, Sudanese Muslim, Italian, Korean, and Latinx, and the characters all sprinkle their speech with words and phrases from their heritage. The characters go through realistic realizations and conversations to make the connection between anti-vampirism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and anti-immigrant sentiment in a powerful statement about the dangers of believing in the inhumanity of a group of people, fully embodying the idea that “never again” means “never again to anyone.” Especially now, with greater division and misunderstanding between groups across the globe, this book is an essential read for nurturing young teenagers’ empathy and compassion for all people.


A direct response to the antisemitic origins of *Dracula*, this book imagines a vampire who happens to be Jewish. Adam was rescued from an antisemitic attack on his synagogue when he was just a baby. His parents died in the attack, but two vampire women from a nearby town turned him into a vampire in order to save his life. They then brought him to their house hidden in the woods, where he spent the next ten years with his older adopted brother, Victor, and their older adopted sibling, Sung. Victor chafes at the hiding and secrecy necessitated by mortals fear and hatred of vampires after Purification nearly wiped out all vampires and drove the survivors underground by the year 1500. He believes all mortals are evil, based on his personal experience of being used as bait by his vampire-hunting parents who left him for dead when the baited vampire bit him and used the strength from his blood to overpower his parents and send them fleeing. Adam, on the other hand, yearns to be friends with mortals and live a “Normal” life. But then a string of murders in their town and neighboring city suggests a vampire-hunter is murdering mortals in an effort to draw out the vampires, whose resistance to the enticing smell of young blood is weak. Victor delights in the supply of young blood, a rarity in their household which is usually fed by blood their phlebotomist mother brings from old, sick patients. Adam is horrified by this attitude and joins two mortals — Luis and Shoshana — who are trying to hunt the murderer, all the while struggling to keep his true identity a secret, knowing that his mortal friends might try to kill him if they knew he was a vampire. Through a series of misunderstandings and lack of communication, the two brothers wind up in grave danger, and Luis’s sister Alejandra is almost killed by the vampire-hunter. But in the end, the vampires’ true nature of healing via blood magic is revealed to the mortals, the vampire-hunter is arrested, and the vampires get the opportunity to live alongside a few mortals who know what they are, with a glimmer of hope that mortals will stop hating vampires based on centuries-long prejudice and misunderstanding.

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Editor’s Note: *Don’t Want to be Your Monster* was named a 2024 Sydney Taylor Book Awards Middle Grade Honor Book.


In the deep forest, Odin creates seven sisters: Mist, Kara, Rota, Sigrun, Eir, and Hilde. Made of dreams, they can appear as human girls or, putting on enchanted cloaks, take the form of swans. All seven can give wishes and dreams physical form, but each has a
**REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS**

Beth Gallego,
Children's Librarian,
Los Angeles Public Library
Los Angeles, CA


It's the sweaty New York summer of 1983, and Beth has come from suburban New England for a journalism internship. She navigates the strange new world of disaffected roommates, cockroaches, office politics, and her fellow interns, especially beguiling Edie, who takes Beth under her glittering wing. The two young women get close quickly; Beth isn't quite sure what to make of Edie, who has no filter. But Edie knows everything about the publication they're working for, and everything about the city. She warns Beth away from the two male interns. Dan, a recent college grad, is competitive, and as to attractive, easy-going Oliver, heading to Harvard with journalistic and political connections, Edie says, "We do not want to get friendly with his sort." She also tells Beth that Oliver is gay. When Beth falls ill, Edie takes care of her, and moves her into her family's spacious Upper West Side apartment. Edie's parents are in the Hamptons and the girls have the city at their feet. All Beth has to do is be Edie's buddy, listen to her non-stop stories and opinions, and try to ignore the affair she's having with an editor whose wife is about to have a baby. Both young women are Jewish, which is subtly in the background of the book. It comes up in discussions, shopping, eating, and Edie saying she's "the real Jew here," as Beth being a suburban Jew "doesn't count...Edie had to win at everything, including being a Jew." Beth keeps silent on her own background, with Kindertransport parents and all four grandparents killed in concentration camps. It's implied that her parents are quiet about it too. Toward the end of the internship, Beth learns that Edie has double-crossed her, spinning tales to her own advantage. Beth moves back to her scummy sublet, and an odd, emotionless sexual relationship with her roommate Tom. She realizes it's been a summer of many first experiences, and it's prepared her for college, and for life. Readers will feel they, too, spent that hot summer in the city. This is a book for mature teens, and for public library YA and high school collections that choose to include books portraying teens drinking, experimenting with drugs, and having sex as a matter of course, without judgment and without punishment.

**Carla Kozak,**
Retired Children's Librarian, San Francisco

but she has a more important secret to hide: she is not Princess Imogen at all. The real Princess Imogen died, and her sisters worried that it would be the final stroke to the king’s already fragile grasp on sanity. They found a look-alike in the Jewish quarter: Seraphina Blum. They dressed the fourteen-year-old girl up as the seventeen-year-old princess and took her to Eldridge Hall, where she has been trapped, placating the king with her impersonation, hoping that her family might have survived, and wondering when the web of lies maintaining order will finally snap. Outside the castle, the survivors of the plague attempt to create order as well. Nico Mott, one of the few with natural immunity, was once a well-off young man with hopes of studying medicine. Now, in exchange for food and shelter at Crane Manor, he acts as footman, valet, and undertaker. What he sees is shocking; some of his fellow “survivors” have become actual monsters, undead creatures who feed on human blood. Nico is sent to Eldridge Hall to search for “immaculates” — those lucky enough never to have been exposed to the disease. As the full horror of what is happening becomes clear, Nico reaches the castle and meets Seraphina. With only each other to confide in, they must figure out how to get out of the castle and how to survive after they do. Drawing inspiration from Poe’s “Masque of the Red Death,” Rutherford centers the action at the castle on a masquerade ball about to be held for Princess Imogen’s twentieth birthday. Small details, such as the chiming of the ebony clock, call back to the story. In this retelling, the tragic experience of Jews during other historical plagues is reflected in the narrative. Consigned to the Jewish quarter, the Jews of Goslin were protected until after Seraphina was taken away. Suspicious and jealous of their continued health, their gentile neighbors accused them of starting the plague themselves, and those who had not succumbed to illness became victims of the ensuing pogrom instead. This historical grounding is balanced by the elements of fantastic gothic horror, from the claustrophobic castle to the undead creatures roaming the wild. Rich with fantasy, adventure, and a little romance, this book is recommended for high school and public library teen collections.

Beth Gallego, Children’s Librarian, Los Angeles Public Library Los Angeles, CA

GOD AND PRAYER

Rabbi Rafael Grossman provides answers to more than 180 questions he was asked by both Jewish and non-Jewish children. There are seven chapters without a table of contents or index, and many questions are followed with “why?” or with questions that are looking for clarifications that are not related to the original question or chapter theme. There was no attempt in editing to ensure continuity in voice or to update the references to dates. Many answers are set in the late 1990s and all were pulled from several different conversations giving a disjointed feel to the entire book. Recommended for libraries with historic connections to Grossman where members may remember asking or hearing these questions and answers.

Sean Patrick Boyle, Librarian, Congregation Kneseth Israel, Allentown, PA, Vice President, President-elect, Association of Jewish Libraries

HOLOCAUST & WORLD WAR II

We Survived the Holocaust: the Bluma & Felix Goldberg Story is a graphic depiction of the story of two remarkable survivors, Bluma and Felix Goldberg. Told as parallel stories, both Bluma and Felix survived the horrors of the Nazi extermination camps, always one step from death. Felix escaped from a train before being recaptured, and Bluma went into hiding with her sister Cela for two years before being captured. Bluma and Felix were able to survive the war and rebuild their lives. The book chronicles both of the protagonists’ lives prior to the war, their war stories, and how they rebuilt their lives after the war. Bluma and Felix met in a DP camp and got married and came to the United States with Bluma’s sister Cela and her husband. The family settled in Columbia, South Carolina, where they were able to establish a Jewish home and a tile business. Bluma and Felix made the decision later in life to begin talking about their Holocaust experiences and it became an important part of their legacy. Throughout the book, the role

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of the mezuzah is an important symbol. The mezuzah was placed on their home in Columbia and at their tile store as a symbol of their Judaism and resilience.

The book contains family photographs, a general timeline starting from World War I, a detailed bibliography, and an index, which is unique for a graphic novel. The genre of Holocaust graphic novels has become more prominent and as result, the type of images being depicted are more life-like. Due to the graphic nature of some of the war images, this book is appropriate for young adults and older. We Survived the Holocaust is recommended for high school and public libraries.

Laura Schutzman,
Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY,
AJL Publications Chair,
Adult Review Co-Editor AJL News & Reviews


This nonfiction graphic novel by award-winning author/illustrator Don Brown describes the many different ways Jewish children escaped the Holocaust. Brown begins the book in 1930 Germany to provide historical background and context for the Holocaust. Dialogue, represented in speech bubbles, is quoted from real people. Separate sections describe historical events in Germany, Poland, Amsterdam, and France. Well-known rescue activities like the Kindertransport are portrayed, but the book also highlights less familiar efforts and people such as Marion Van Binsbergen, the Dutch woman who saved more than 100 Jewish children, and an Indonesian family in Amsterdam who hid a Jewish child. Brown depicts the courage of children who crossed over the Pyrenees from France into Spain. He does not avoid sharing disturbing information like the anguish of parents who sent their children away or the horrors of Kristallnacht. Brown’s line-drawn illustrations are rendered in somber hues of blues, browns, and grays. He occasionally uses red or yellow as emphasis such as red as the background of a black swastika. Double page wordless spreads occur throughout the book to enhance the narrative.

Thoroughly researched, the end matter includes a list of source notes as well as an extensive bibliography. An afterword, titled “Uninterrupted,” discusses other violent struggles in recent history as well as antisemitism today. This book is recommended for public, school, and synagogue libraries.

Evelyn B. Freeman
Professor Emerita, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH


The story of the Holocaust in Bulgaria is not a well-known one. *Acts of Resistance* attempts to shed light on the rescue of almost the entire Bulgarian Jewish community of 50,000 people from the Nazi killing machine in 1943-1944. Written as a novel, *Acts of Resistance* presents the stories of three fictional teenagers, based on the memoirs of actual people who were very involved in the rescue: Misha, Peter, and Lily. Misha is a Jewish teenager hiding in a monastery, who gets a job as a driver for the archbishop who is working to defy the pro-Nazi policies. Peter is a partisan who was part of a delegation of people who went to Sofia, the Bulgarian capital to try and prevent the deportation of the Jews, by beseeching King Boris. Lily, a worker in the office of a high-ranking Reich official who is responsible for arranging the deportation of the Jewish community of Bulgaria, becomes a spy and is able to prevent the mass deportations. Told in a sequential fashion starting from March of 1943 and ending in September 1944, it becomes apparent that all the characters are risking their lives to stop the killing of the Jews. The Church and the king both played prominent roles in the rescue efforts. Each of the characters portrayed have a specific role in preventing the atrocity.

The true story of the people responsible for the rescue of the Bulgarian community was hidden during the Communist era, and the personal stories are now coming to light. The afterward discusses some of the brave individuals involved in the rescue. This book, while written for a young adult audience, is an important text in Holocaust education and therefore is recommended for all types of libraries.

Laura Schutzman,
Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY,
AJL Publications Chair,
Adult Review Co-Editor AJL News & Reviews


As the number of survivors dwindles, it is important to record their stories. Jeremy Dronfield’s recounting of a father and son’s experiences brings the *Shoah* to life for pre-teens and their families. We meet the Kleinmann family in Vienna just before the Nazis invade Austria, watch the world shrink for the city’s Jews through Kristallnacht, and experience the family’s agonizing...
decisions. Readers follow 14-year-old Fritz as he is arrested and transported to Buchenwald, where he and his father are reunited and suffer in the work camp. When his father is chosen for transfer to Auschwitz, Fritz volunteers to go as well; they are separated in the death camp, but both survive.

The book includes several gruesome instances, identifying Nazi guards and camp administrators by name. Alternating with this story of horror and survival, we also have glimpses of Kurt (Fritz’s younger brother), who is sent to America and must find his own way in a new environment. After the war Fritz and their father are reunited; they reconnect with Kurt, and all live into old age.

This is a middle school-worthy volume. In addition to its harrowing narrative, it contains a useful timeline and glossary. Librarians should be aware that an adult version was published under the same title in 2021. The author has downplayed some of the violent images seen in the earlier book, but the story retains much of its power. It should be considered by all synagogue, school, and public libraries and Holocaust centers.

Fred Isaac, Oakland, CA

Krasner, Barbara. Facing the Enemy: How a Nazi Youth Camp in America Tested a Friendship. Calkins Creek, 2023. 365 pp. $19.95 (9781662680250) HC. Gr. 7–9. Reviewed from an ARC.

It’s the summer of 1937 and 8th graders Benjy Puterman and Tommy Anspach look forward to graduation and another lazy summer together in Newark, NJ before starting Weequahic High School. Unfortunately, Tommy’s father has other plans for his son, impacting both boys’ lives.

Tommy, who is not Jewish, is raised in the shadow of an older brother who died while his parents lived in Germany, before moving to America. Because of survivor’s guilt, he always wants to please his parents. When his father bullies him to go to Camp Nordland, he reluctantly agrees.

The camp is located in the New Jersey countryside, run by the German American Bund to train youngsters to become Hitler youth. Tommy tells Benjy that no Jews are allowed in this particular camp and he starts to distance himself from his friend. This abrupt behavior confuses and hurts Benjy, but he still tries to dissuade him from going to this camp. Meanwhile, Benjy’s father and his friend, ex-boxer Nat Arno, are part of the Newark Minutemen, who make it their mission to fight fascism. Benjy overhears them planning a “visit” to Camp Nordland one night and sneaks into the back of the car so he can see what Tommy is doing there. He is shocked to see that this is not like any summer camp Benjy has ever imagined. They are speaking in German and marching. Benjy realizes that Tommy is being brainwashed. Later, in high school, Benjy joins the junior division of the Minutemen to fight antisemitism in his school. Over the next few years, Tommy continues to shrink in order to please his alcoholic and abusive father. Eventually Tommy realizes that his father is mentally ill and must find a way to stand up to his father and stand up for what’s right.

Told in her signature free-verse style, author and historian Barbara Krasner paints a vivid picture of the pre-war years as it played out for two teenage boys. Included are photos of the Newark Minutemen, Camp Nordland, a timeline of events from 1933-1945 in America and Eastern Europe, and extensive source notes, glossary and newspaper records. This title is recommended for Jewish and public libraries.

Esther Schnaidman, Librarian, Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey, Teaneck, NJ


The story of the escape of the Danish community from the clutches of the Nazis has been told before, notably in Lois Lowry’s Number the Stars. Almost all the Jews were able to escape from Denmark to Sweden due to the support of the local population. Written as a graphic novel, with realistic depictions of the events of World War II, specifically discussing the role that the king played in the rescue of the Jews, this book offers one of many stories of survival of the Danish community. It includes maps and diagrams throughout the story and very detailed end matter with photographs and a detailed bibliography. Told from the perspective of a grandmother, she recounts her life prior to and during the war when she was a child. She returns to Denmark with her grandchildren to visit her brother, and throughout their journey through Copenhagen she recounts pieces of her story. Prior to the war, her Judaism was not an important part of her identity, and she was surprised to discover that she was not just like the other Danes. In September 1943, her whole world changed when the Nazis decided to deport the Jews of Denmark and she was forced to flee with her family to Sweden.

Almost all the Jews were able to escape from Denmark to Sweden...
**REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS**

Due to the support of the local population. Featured prominently in the story are the resistance fighters, called “Holger Danske” after a Viking king, who coordinated the rescue efforts. Over the course of a few days, they were able to relocate the majority of the Danish Jewish community to the fishing villages close to Sweden and coordinated fishing vessels to ferry them to Sweden. A well-depicted story of the Holocaust, this book would be a welcome addition to all types of libraries whose users are young adults.

Laura Schutzman, Hebrew Academy of Nassau County, Uniondale, NY, AJL Publications Chair, Adult Review Co-Editor AJL News & Reviews


How do we keep the knowledge and lessons of the *Shoah* relevant to youth today, particularly outside of the Jewish community? One idea is to retool traditional lessons and approaches to storytelling. In *Courage to Dream,* Shusterman has paired five stories based on Holocaust history with a fantastical story element, in order to relate the relevant facts. Numbered *aleph* through *hay* and using the Hebrew characters for chapter numbers, the book begins with a tale of hidden siblings who find a magic window showing a beautiful, safe world to dream about, or escape to. Other chapters pair realities of life in camps or on the run with characters from Jewish and East European folklore; a Golem and Baba Yaga feature to help save Jewish lives. The relative ease of existence in Denmark and the subsequent Danish evacuation of Jews to Sweden also receives a superhero pairing, and the final chapter presents a contemporary girl with a gift from her dying grandmother which allows her to see a “Sliding Doors” style world, one where the Final Solution never happened, complete with relatives who never had the opportunity to be born, but also a world where antisemitism is alive and rampant and July 4th is not a celebration of American independence but an annual day to vandalslize and threaten Jews.

The illustrations by Andrés Vera Martínez are dark and full of action without being too graphic. Each chapter ends with notes for the reader, explaining such things as the Bielski brothers and other resistance groups, facts about real hidden children and efforts to help them including those by the Chinese Consul-General Feng-Shan Ho and the French village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, and a 1943 prisoner revolt in the Treblinka camp.

Shusterman clearly wants to connect readers with the past in a way that will hold their attention, using the graphic novel format and superhero and other fantasy elements to convey the facts. Is this successful? Perhaps. And by allowing the characters to have imaginative dreams, it serves to turn each of the millions killed, imprisoned, or hidden from numbers into individuals with lives, hopes, and dreams, just like the readers.

Judy Ehrenstein, Children’s Librarian, Montgomery County Public Libraries, Bethesda, MD, Co-Editor, AJL News and Reviews, Children’s and Young Adult Reviews

Editor’s Note: *Courage to Dream: Tales of Hope in the Holocaust* was named a 2024 Sydney Taylor Book Awards Young Adult Honor Book.


This rendering of the Kindertransport story, very much from the children’s points of view, captures their confusion, fear, and sorrow of being torn from their families, and then their resilience as they adapt to new lives in a new country. Also giving readers a glimpse of the fortitude and selflessness of their parents, and alluding to the man who helped them, it is both heartbreaking and hopeful.

This is an excellent complement to *Nicky and Vera* (Peter Sis, 2021), as it introduces Sir Nicholas Winton at the end, but with a focus on the children. Four are mentioned in the end notes; they wear color-coded clothing throughout the book. Vera Diamantova Gissing is in red, and her older sister, Eva, is in orange. It is their mother’s words that are quoted, “There will be times when you feel lonely and homesick. Let the stars of the night and the sun of the day be the messenger of our thoughts and love.”

Alko’s childlike illustrations, done with acrylic paint, colored pencil, and collage, with a motif of stars on most pages, create the perfect background. The stars of the Yad Vashem Children’s Memorial are mentioned in the thorough and excellent back matter, which includes a timeline, biographical material, source notes, and a bibliography. This title is highly recommended for all libraries.

Carla Kozak, Retired Children’s Librarian, San Francisco

Continued on page 24
The Miracle Seed has some lovely touches. There are photos of the two plants at the back of the book, making the drawings even more real. There is a timeline, stretching from the First Temple to 2020 CE. And throughout, the author has placed ‘eggs’ that move the narrative along.

This short graphic presentation covers several under-represented stories: women scientists; the interaction of scientific groups; and the rebirth of ancient species. All of them are presented as part of Israeli society and research. For these reasons, all of them should be celebrated. The Miracle Seed should be considered by all libraries.

Fred Isaac
Oakland, CA

Leshem-Pelly, Miri. A Feather, a Pebble, a Shell. Kar-Ben, 2024. 32 pp. $18.99 (9798765607749) HC. K–Gr. 2. Reviewed from e-ARC.

A girl hikes in Israel and looks for small things to hold in her hand. Starting in the north of Israel, she sits on a big rock in the Dan River and picks up a black pebble from the river bed. On the trail on Mount Meron, she finds a porcupine quill. At Dor Beach, she finds a seashell. On a rainy day at the Sharon Nature Reserve, the snails come out, and she finds an empty shell. At HaYarkon Park (in Tel Aviv), she sees a hoopoe (Israel’s national bird) pecking for bugs and touches the feather it sheds as it flies away. She sees, and touches, ancient olive trees in Sataf and rock formations in limestone caves in the Judean Hills. She floats in the Dead Sea, sees Griffin Vultures in a canyon in the Negev, and further south, she watches as an ibex butts an acacia tree to knock off some pods to eat. Finally, she swims in the Red Sea (Eilat) and sees colorful coral. She leaves


Teenager Gerda Pohyrle, the daughter of Polish immigrants, is an outsider. Despite the family’s move to Stuttgart, Germany, their Jewishness separates them from others. Gerda quickly learns how to hide her true self and develop a more mainstream persona. But when Hitler comes to power in 1933, her innate sense of tikkun olam and activism come to the fore. She is arrested for distribution of anti-Nazi propaganda. When released, she flees to Paris and meets Hungarian Jew Andre Friedmann, a kindred spirit. Together they develop a photojournalism business and rename themselves: Robert Capa and Gerda Taro. They feel compelled to witness the Spanish civil war. Tension rises as Germans bomb Spain and each day brings new challenges for Gerda and Robert as they travel back and forth between France and Spain. Gerda returns to Spain alone in July 1937 where she succumbed at age 26 to wounds incurred during a German attack.

This is Wilson’s third novel in verse for teens and Wilson is careful to note this book is not a biography. She has created conversations, letters, and inner thoughts. She continues to make poetry accessible with a single narrator (Gerda), short lines and ample space and no complicated formal verse structure that would sacrifice meaning for form. Many poems are titled “Snapshot” to emphasize Gerda’s growing talent with a camera. Also interspersed are telegrams and letters to and from family members who fled to Yugoslavia for safety, and from Robert. Gerda is a likable, vibrant, strong character. The final set of poems chronicles her death, providing an emotional conclusion for the reader. Ample back matter includes glossaries in German, French, and Spanish, backgrounds on the real characters, and information on the Spanish Civil War.

Recommended for readers interested in female agency, especially Jewish female agency, wartime journalism, photography, Holocaust, and poetry.

Barbara Krasner
Somerset, NJ
Holocaust & Genocide Studies faculty
Gratz College

ISRAEL


The magic of Israel seems unending. This graphic novel book shows its agronomic research at a high level. The story begins in the time of Masada, when the Romans destroyed the Holy Land’s date orchards as they conquered the territory. Several seeds were found at the fortress during excavation in the 1960s. They were sent to Bar-Ilan, where they were stored. In 2004 a researcher planted several of them; one (called Methuselah) sprouted, and its seeds have been sent around the world. Since then, additional seeds from other archaeological digs have sprouted. One of them, named Hannah, flowered in 2020. Its first harvest was 111 dates; the next year there were almost 700. The book ends with citations for Hadassah Hospital and the Arava Institute, the organizations involved with this amazing idea.

Within its fascinating story, The Miracle Seed has some lovely touches. There are photos of the two plants at the back of the book, making the drawings even more real. There is a timeline, stretching from the First Temple to 2020 CE. And throughout, the author has placed “eggs” that move the narrative along.

This short graphic presentation covers several under-represented stories: women scientists; the interaction of scientific groups; and the rebirth of ancient species. All of them are presented as part of Israeli society and research. For these reasons, all of them should be celebrated. The Miracle Seed should be considered by all libraries.

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A girl hikes in Israel and looks for small things to hold in her hand. Starting in the north of Israel, she sits on a big rock in the Dan River and picks up a black pebble from the river bed. On the trail on Mount Meron, she finds a porcupine quill. At Dor Beach, she finds a seashell. On a rainy day at the Sharon Nature Reserve, the snails come out, and she finds an empty shell. At HaYarkon Park (in Tel Aviv), she sees a hoopoe (Israel’s national bird) pecking for bugs and touches the feather it sheds as it flies away. She sees, and touches, ancient olive trees in Sataf and rock formations in limestone caves in the Judean Hills. She floats in the Dead Sea, sees Griffin Vultures in a canyon in the Negev, and further south, she watches as an ibex butts an acacia tree to knock off some pods to eat. Finally, she swims in the Red Sea (Eilat) and sees colorful coral. She leaves

Continued on page 25
all these treasures for you to find. Boxes in the lower corner of the pages provide information about all the things the girl finds, and an author’s note explains Israel in terms of geographic location, topography, geology, and climate. A map at the back shows all the locations.

Based on Leshem-Pelly’s childhood experiences, she captures the beauty and diversity of Israel with shades of blue and green for the sites in northern and central Israel, and shades of tan and brown for the rocky, stark landscape of the south. As the girl and her friends hike through Israel, the reader will learn about the different locations, but also about respect for the environment. By leaving behind all the things she finds, others can enjoy them, too. Librarians and teachers will want to include this book in units about Israel and nature and may take inspiration for a local nature walk.

Chava Pinchuck, Editor, Jewish Values Finder, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

LIFECYCLE & JEWISH VALUES


Benny is a young Jewish boy who loves school and most of all, recess and soccer. But when he is excluded from playing soccer by the other boys, he is upset and extremely disappointed. For several weeks, he sits alone at recess and no longer enjoys being at school. Benny tries again to join the boys but is rebuffed once more. He watches the soccer game and other boys playing happily which makes him very sad. Benny’s older cousin Daniel tells him about the invisible bucket that each of us has which holds our good feelings. When the bucket is full, we feel happy but when it is empty, we feel sad or mad. From that point on, each illustration shows a bucket above the characters’ heads highlighting the feelings of that individual. Readers can evaluate the characters’ feelings and moods by reading their facial expressions and observing the buckets above their heads.

Special sections at the end of the book include separate notes for kids, teachers, and parents in addition to a list of resources about bucket filling, social thinking, and bully proofing. The notes for kids introduce the three main characters focusing on their personalities, fears, and limitations while showing the reader how to deal with such friends and encouraging them to become a social detective who can figure out how and why the boys act as they do.

The section for parents is a guide on what to do when your child is excluded or excludes others. Teachers are directed on how to evaluate the social dynamics in the classroom and be on the lookout for lonely children.

The characters are all observant boys (Benny is a companion book to Sara the Bucket Filler: A Story About Showing Kindness and Being Happy, 2017) portrayed in an Orthodox environment highlighting their dress, mannerisms, and speech. However, the universal message is about inclusion, social dynamics, and friendship. This book will be appropriate for all students dealing with these social issues as long as they are able to appreciate and relate to the greater Jewish community and can be utilized in school and public libraries.

Rachel Glasser, Retired Librarian, Yavneh Academy – Paramus, NJ


Bracha paints a big, beautiful, and colorful picture which makes her extremely happy and proud. But an accident causes red paint to spill all over the picture and leaves Bracha very sad, angry, and frustrated. Various family members offer simple solutions and comfort, but nothing seems to work, and Bracha cannot push away her feelings and hurt as they eventually walk away and decide to leave her alone. Bracha refuses to pretend, blame others, laugh, or push away her feelings. But only her close friend, Sara, stays behind to console, listen, and calm Bracha with a loving hug, a sympathetic ear, and a warm embrace. Then they paint a new vibrant picture together, and both girls are finally smiling and happy once again.

A “Note to Parents and Educators” is included with a discussion of empathy and how it can be taught through experience and emotionally connects parents to their children. The illustrations reflect the traditional Orthodox life of Bracha and her family and friends, and it is appropriate for Orthodox day school collections. While children in a more secular setting may not relate to the specific characters, the concept of empathy and relationships can and should be understood and internalized by all. The facial illustrations of the characters are quite expressive and younger children will be able to follow the story through them. This book will help children appreciate feelings, reactions, and responses to...
daily situations and show them how seemingly big problems can be broken down, understood, and resolved.

Rachel Glasser, Retired Librarian, Yavneh Academy – Paramus, NJ


Young minds are like a forest whose trees are filled with monkeys. All kinds of ideas and thoughts are jumping around. This can make you tired and make it hard to focus on important things. There are several exercises, inspired by Jewish custom and observance, which use breath and movement, that can keep the monkeys at bay and make it easier to stay in the present.

One can take a deep breath in and “Smell the Challah,” then let out the breath and “Blow on the Chicken Soup.” “Blow the Shofar” is another breathing exercise, and one can “Be a Dove” and spread their arms wide and breathe in and out. Body awareness is emphasized in “Wander through the Desert,” as balasana (child’s pose) is taken on the floor and the poser focuses on his legs, his tummy as he breathes, and then his arms. “Light the Shabbat Candles” is another focus exercise, and finally there is a meditation using the word “Shalom.” There is a QR code included so you can watch the author lead you through Jewish Mindfulness exercises.

Sissa’s Jewish Mindfulness exercises are creative and beautifully exemplify the Jewish concept of *Yishuv HaDa’at* — more than mindfulness, creating a connection and harmony to calm oneself.

Carrossine’s illustrations with vivid color and action bring these exercises to life, with the “Be a Dove” picture practically radiating positive energy. Mindfulness is a hard concept for adults to embrace, and an even harder one to explain to children, so this is not a book for recreational reading, but more of a resource for parents and teachers. While the analogy of monkeys in trees to a child’s brain is excellent, most children will probably not engage with the text, but they will enjoy the exercises.

Chava Pinchuck, Editor, Jewish Values Finder, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

Amira and her grandmother enter a cholent competition. They don’t make the traditional Ashkenazi recipe with barley, potatoes, beans, and beef. They make *T’bit*, an Iraqi dish with exotic spices, chicken, and rice. As they prepare and cook, the contest spectators keep chiding, “this is not a cholent,” though they are drawn in by the aroma. Amira and Nana go home for Shabbat while the *T’bit* (also known as *Hamin*, literally “hot”) cooks overnight. Amira is nervous about how their traditional food will be received. The next day, the judges also comment “this is not a cholent,” as they savor the *T’bit*. Amira explains that it IS a cholent — an Iraqi stew.

The judges are unanimous in declaring it “the most different and delectable cholent we have ever tasted!” Soon everyone at the competition lines up for a bowl.

The author’s *Shobam’s Bangle* (Kar-Ben, 2022) was a heart-warming story of grandmother and grandchild and Iraqi culture. The idea behind *This Is Not a Cholent* is clever; grandmother and granddaughter enter a contest and make something unusual that surprises and delights everyone. Unfortunately, there are faults in the execution, the most glaring being the amount of text and sophistication of the words and the recipe in contrast to the cute, colorful, simple illustrations. Will readers in the target audience know the story takes place in Australia from the clues “Down Under” and “kookaburras,” and does it matter if it isn’t mentioned again? This highlights the missed opportunities to show Iraqi and Australian culture in both the text and illustrations. The *T’bit* recipe is included. It is not so kid-friendly and requires some unusual spices — kudos to the parent who undertakes this project.

What is the message? Is *T’bit* a cholent, and are Amira and Nana cooking a stew like everyone else? Or is *T’bit* a unique culinary experience of Iraqi Jews that can be enjoyed by others? As one of the few books about Iraqi Jews, talented librarians may be able to use it to their advantage.

Chava Pinchuck, Editor, Jewish Values Finder, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

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It is 1918 in Lower Manhattan and the day young Rivka has been wishing for has finally arrived. She calls out the tenement window to the iceman, “Today is my first day of school!” How disappointed Rivka is when Mama informs Rivka she cannot attend school because Mama needs to work at the shirtwaist factory. Someone needs to watch little sister, Miriam, while Mama is at work and Papa is sick with the flu. Although devastated at not being able to join other children in a school with a teacher, Rivka is determined to learn even if she isn’t in a classroom.

As the days go on Rivka and Miriam encounter one kind neighbor after another and Rivka suddenly has a great idea of how she can both learn and help her dear neighbors. At Mr. Solomon’s grocery shop, she sweeps, cleans counters, and stacks potatoes as she sings to Miriam. In return, Mr. Solomon patiently teaches Rivka how to write the alphabet. By fall, she can read the labels on the jars of preserves. Using buttons, Mr. Cohen the tailor, teaches Rivka addition. By winter, she can count out pennies to pay the iceman. On Fridays, Rivka helps kind Mrs. Langholtz clean her home for Shabbat, as the elderly woman recites the American history lesson she is learning in night school. By spring, Rivka knows all 48 U.S. states. As the months pass and Rivka is busy helping and learning, Papa is slowly recovering. When Mama decides to surprise Rivka by inviting all of her “teachers” to their home, they all bring her thoughtful gifts that she can use when she starts school. The best gift of all is Papa’s full recovery.

Wallmark includes an informative author’s note, describing what NYC immigrant life was like during the turn of the century, making things even more difficult during the flu pandemic. Lirius’ gorgeous gouache-style folk art perfectly complements Wallmark’s story. This is a wonderful and uplifting picture book celebrating the beautiful presents one can give and receive as a community comes together to help one another. This title is recommended for all Jewish and public libraries.

Esther Schnaidman, Librarian, Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey, Teaneck, NJ

SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS


In *This Is My Shabbat*, Chris Barash provides a delightful tale of one boy’s Shabbat experience, brought to life by the author’s sensory imagery descriptions, and enhanced by Aviel Basil’s award-winning colorful and vibrant illustrations.

A young boy wakes up on Shabbat morning, looking forward to a relaxing and peaceful day with family, friends, and his pet dog, Ellie. His day begins with a delicious breakfast shared with his parents, followed by a pleasant and scenic walk to the Synagogue. After services, the importance of quality time with family and friends is emphasized as they all enjoy a relaxing picnic together at the beach. Through Basil’s lively illustrations, the reader learns the young boy is blind. With the author’s emphasis on sensory imagery, the boy’s descriptive narration allows readers and listeners to touch, smell, and hear what he is experiencing throughout his Shabbat day.

In this short and charming book, each page is successfully enhanced with descriptive words and phrases such as “click-clack,” “hearing stories,” “icy lemonade,” and “their voices warm and friendly.” These allow young listeners and early readers to use all five senses to imagine what the boy hears and feels. If you close your eyes, listeners can perfectly sense the many ways the boy experiences his Shabbat. Basil’s remarkable illustrations further complement the story and positively incorporate both inclusivity and diversity. To broaden readership appeal, the book provides both printed text and Braille pages. As a bonus, the book also includes a QR code that links to an audio version. Overall, this picture book allows readers to experience one boy’s Shabbat in a manner that is equally enjoyable and accessible to differently-abled children.

Mimi Leyton
Volunteer at Greenberg Families Library,
Ottawa, ON, Canada


The Bear Family is getting ready for Passover. They prepare the items for the *Seder* plate. Little Bear is excited for his favorite part of the evening: the search for the Afikomen.

Continued on page 28
He has invented an “Afikotective” using his toy elephant. After the middle matzah is broken, Grandma hides the larger piece, and soon Little Bear and Elsie are on the case. They unsuccessfully check a bowl, the refrigerator, and the pantry. Little Bear decides his device must be broken, so he gets the tool box to fix it, and that’s where Grandma hid the Afikomen. An “Afikotective” badge is included in the back for expert searching.

Hoffman’s illustrations are the highlight, with pieced paper giving a three-dimensional effect and details like an apron decorated with frogs and Grandma’s dangling earrings adding to the cuteness factor. But the Bear Family’s Seder is a bit disjointed. They prepare items for the Seder plate, then skip Kiddush and Karpas and immediately break the middle matzah. From there, Little Bear begins his search, and once he finds the Afikomen, he returns to the table, where everyone’s Haggadah is on a page that says, “the end,” although Grandma and Grandpa sip some more wine. An author’s note explains the word afikomen and its role in the Seder, but none of the other aspects of the Seder or Passover are included in the book or explained. Grandma is in a wheelchair, so how she got the afikomen in a box on a shelf may also require some detective skills. The youngest library users will enjoy the pictures, the search, and the special badge, but other books should be on the reading list to provide a more comprehensive presentation of the holiday.

Chava Pinchuck, Editor, Jewish Values Finder, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel

Miryam, who lives in a small village in Uganda, wakes up Friday morning to the sound of drums and wants to dance. Her mother reminds her that Shabbat is coming and there is much she must do to help prepare for Shabbat. “Now is not the time for dancing,” her mother scolds. While Miryam and her friend Aliza collect fruit from the mango and pawpaw trees for the Shabbat treat, Miryam hears drum beats and wants to dance, but she needs to run errands for her mother and has no time to dance. As Miryam draws water from the well and fills a jug so that her mother will have water for the challah dough, Miryam sees dancers practicing for the Shabbat celebration. The dancers invite Miryam to join them and learn the dances. On Friday night when the villagers are sitting outdoors and a table is set with a white table cloth, candle sticks, a large Kiddush cup and challah, the dancers enter the village. Miryam joins them and the village has a new Shabbat experience.

Miryam is a delightful character. Her optimism and joy jump off the pages. The brightly colored illustrations enhance the book; especially beautiful are the dancers’ authentic costumes. Miryam’s Dance teaches that there are many different kinds of Jews around the world, but we all share the gift of a joyous Shabbat.

In a note, Rabbi Gershom Sizomu, chief Rabbi of Uganda talks about Jewish Ugandan Shabbat customs such as singing, Shabbat dinner that includes Matoke (mashed plantains), smoked fish in peanut sauce, and fresh challah. The back matter includes a recipe for matoke and a few words in Lugandal. When you read this book aloud and the listeners get up and dance, join them!

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH

Sholom, a cute blond-haired child, with tzitzit showing and wearing a velvet kippah helps his mother prepare for Pesach. The night before Pesach, Mommy, whose photograph does not appear in the book, hides ten pieces of bread around the house. Sholom helps Totty search for the chametz. The rituals of the Seder are brought to life by the beautiful full page color photographs. At the end of the Seder, when “everyone is singing songs. Well — not everyone,” the young boy is asleep under the table. This book is a realistic tour of the rituals before and during the Seder. The tour guide is a handsome child whose delight and enjoyment of the holiday will bring smiles to the readers. The striking photographs are so expressive that children can enjoy this book even if they have no one to read them the words.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH

Continued on page 29
A lovely little rhyming poem is presented in this very simple board book celebrating the weekly Shabbat preparations. It also serves as a first counting book, with each page illustrating an item by number. “1 table draped in white, 2 candles set to light, 3 braids in challah bread, 4 kittens to be fed,” until reaching “10 smiles. Shabbat is here!” The peppy illustrations of the family include children, parents, a grandparent, and some pets (adding up to ten). The skin tones are varied. Little ones will enjoy this cute board book and adults will enjoy reading the well-structured rhymes.

**Rachel Glasser,**
*Retired Librarian Yavneh Academy, Paramus, NJ*


T his fun Hanukkah book should be popular because it’s interactive and fun to play with. It is not actually a “book” per se, but an illustrated huge cardboard menorah set wherein the “candles” are actually little slots holding very small and very thin books with little Hanukkah stories for each night. In a way, it’s similar to an advent calendar for Christmas; children slide out one paper “candle” each night to learn about holiday traditions, with each story featuring Lena, her cat Pickles, and their family. The colorful book can be opened up to sit on the table or mantlepiece for eight nights and a new tiny story can be read each night. When you put the little candle-shaped book back in its slot, you turn it over so the flame appears for the nights when the chanukiah has been lit. This interactive unique Hanukkah storybook is surely something children will look forward to finding in the family Hanukkah decorations box year after year, and makes a lovely gift. It may not be suitable for library circulation, but more of a display item or for use with groups of children.

**Lisa Silverman,**
*Retired Director,*
*Sperber Jewish Community Library, Los Angeles*


T he voice is that of a spectacled pony tailed girl, whose engaging spirit will bring readers along with her from the start: “Come and bake with us today/Mom and Dad and Baby too/We love challah — so will you.” The energetic cartoon illustrations move across the pages with each family member engaged in baking preparations, even the baby and the dog whose mishaps are subtly and comically conveyed. Any reader following this family’s Friday tradition will learn about the necessary ingredients — yeast and water, sugar, salt, oil, flour — their oversized packages boldly displayed. Action
words — mix, pour, knead, drizzle — will expand vocabularies like the dough that is stretched all the way across the room in order to braid it. Family projects are always special and the pay-off here is that when evening comes, grandparents arrive to celebrate Shabbat. “Grandma lights the candles bright./She and Grandpa hold us tight./Finally — our favorite part— /homemade challah from the heart.” Among challah stories, this one will quickly rise to the top. Charming illustrations, pitch-perfect rhyme, a recipe, and ample back matter make this a recommended purchase for all schools and libraries, both religious and secular.

Gloria Koster, Retired School Librarian—New Canaan, CT Public Schools, Member of the Children’s Book Committee of Bank Street College of Education


It’s Friday afternoon and Mama’s freshly baked babka has disappeared. When Sammy and Sol return from school, they set out to solve the mystery with Mazel, their dog, in tow. From here the story veers into a folk tale-like pattern. The boys visit three neighbors, and while none of them has seen the missing cake, they each serve the children a special dish and send them on their way with a replacement dessert. Ashkenazi, Sephardic, and Mizrahi dishes are represented with cholent, gefilte fish, stuffed grape leaves, and bourekas among the delicacies (back matter provides descriptions of all foods included plus a recipe for the titular babka). The caring neighbors are invited to Shabbat dinner, and when everyone, including Mazel, is gathered around the festive table, all eyes turn to the obvious babka thief!

Characters dressed in styles that range from old fashioned to hipster add a bit of confusion as to the intended time period. However, in a story that celebrates Jewish food traditions that span the ages, this is not critical. The bright illustrations are executed in a cheerful primitive style, and the text is well suited for both lap reading and for story time. This sweet tale has universal appeal and can be enjoyed by readers of all backgrounds. A likely choice for Jewish schools and institutions, it is recommended for public schools and public libraries as well.

Rachel Glasser Retired Librarian Yavneh Academy, Paramus, NJ


A rhyming and interactive book, this story features bright, colorful illustrations as a traditional Jewish family prepares for the weekly Shabbos celebration. It is geared to the very young as customs, mitzvot, and details concerning Jewish law are explained in the basic text and in the flaps. Beginning with the cleaning preparation, continuing through the meal, learning and attending synagogue services, showing the joy in music and family time, and ending with havdalah and a traditional Saturday night melaveh malkah (special after shabbos meal), the book provides a comprehensive view of Shabbos.

There is a glossary provided at the end which explains the various Hebrew terms. However, most of the concepts and observations are geared to Orthodox families and will not be understood or related to by those with limited or no Jewish background. The illustrations are somewhat stilted and unrealistic, but they fit with the conventional story line. This fun, lively book with its fun flaps is a positive introduction to Shabbos for a traditional Orthodox child.

Gloria Koster, Retired School Librarian—New Canaan, CT Public Schools, Member of the Children’s Book Committee of Bank Street College of Education
AJL REVIEWS FOR ADULT LITERATURE
EDITED BY DANIEL SCHEIDE AND LAURA SCHUTZMAN

Poetry


Avraham Sutzkever (1913–2010), was an acclaimed Yiddish modernist poet, part of the Yung Vilne (Young Vilna) movement of the 1930s. He has been called “the greatest poet of the Holocaust” by The New York Times.

Ode to the Dove is a bilingual illustrated edition of the titular poem, with both the original Yiddish text and English translation by Zachary Sholem Berger. The poem describes the poet’s struggle to express himself and the help given him by a dove. The dove comes to his aid when he hands him a piece of paper, “My dove, you gave me a sheet of paper - a mirror.” The rest of the poem has dreamy poetic images including dancers, moon, rainbow and tears. While some of the poetic images in the poem are beautiful, there are other images that are haunting and sad. The illustrations, by Liora Ostroff, a Baltimore-based painter, are colorful with one showing a violinist by a tree which was probably influenced by Chagall’s paintings.

Ellen Share,
Washington Hebrew Congregation Children’s Librarian
Washington, DC

Fiction


Narrative Holocaust fiction is mostly focused on Eastern Europe, and as a result, the stories of the other Axis countries are not as well known. However, in The Little Liar, Mitch Albom illuminates the story of the Greek community of Salonika (Thessaloniki), where Jews comprised the majority of the population of the city prior to World War II.

Albom focuses on four main characters, Nico, Sebastian, Fannie, and Udo Graf, following them through the war and its aftermath. Nico, the main protagonist, is a young boy who befriends the Nazi guard, Udo Graf. Graf uses Nico to manipulate the Jews of Salonika to get them to board the trains to the camp, by lying to them about their final destination. Prior to this deception, Nico is never able to lie. After he realizes that he had been deceived, Nico is never able to tell the truth again. After befriending a forger, Nico spends the rest of the war posing as different characters to survive, He also spends the rest of his life trying to make up for his duplicity, donating money yearly to those he wronged.

Sebastian, Nico’s brother, is part of the initial roundup of Jews and therefore is at the train station on the day of the deportation. Upon seeing his brother helping the Nazis, he is filled with hate and holds onto his hatred for most of his life. Sebastian marries Fannie after the war, and has a daughter, but he is never able to move on from the injustices perpetrated on him by the Nazis. He becomes a Nazi hunter, leaving his wife and daughter to chase after those Nazis who were able to escape punishment.

Udo Graf is assigned Commandant of Auschwitz after leaving Greece and is responsible for sentencing millions of people to their deaths. After the war, he is able to escape to America under a false identity and attempt to rebuild his life. All four characters are reunited in 1983 for a memorial ceremony for the victims of Salonika who were killed in Auschwitz, and finally all aspects of the “truth” are exposed.

A well written and well researched book, The Little Liar is highly recommended for public, synagogue, and high school libraries, as it deals with an aspect of the Holocaust that is not widely known or represented in fiction collections.

Laura Schutzman,
AJL Publications Chair,
Adult Review Editor, AJL News & Reviews


The title character of this novel, Hyman Babushkin, is the founder and leader of “Encounter Judaism,” which may be interpreted as a fictional equivalent of “Jewish Renewal” (a trans-denominational approach to Judaism with the goal of revitalization). Orphaned during the Shoa, he encounters a Chassidic sect that adopts him. Eventually the sect relocates, and brings Babushkin to the U.S. The rebebe, who heads the Chassidic group, gives him rabbinical ordination in 1958 and the task of outreach to the Jews of New York City. He falls prey to the lusts of the world of promiscuous sex and pot parties and is finally excommunicated by the rebebe. Getting some

Continued on page 32

Beautifully crafted with poignancy and humor, *Sandwich* is the story of a family’s vacation week in Cape Cod, told in voice of Rachel (Rocky), a mom and daughter smack in the middle of her life, grappling with the relentless indignities of menopause and trying to connect with both her adult children and her aging parents. Rachel is also in the grip of anxiety, about her family, her past choices, and her marriage. Through the week at the shore, a few secrets are revealed, and relationships are tested.

Although not largely a Jewish book, either in religious practice or strongly articulated identity, there is a moving revelation about Rocky’s dad’s grandparents’ fate in Poland during the Holocaust that speaks importantly to American Jews’ inheritance of hidden trauma. Rocky’s dad, Mort, when questioned by the youngest generation, reveals, for the first time, that his grandparents perished in Treblinka. Rocky is shaken and angry; how can you not have told me this before, she cries. Mort is flummoxed, saying, in essence, surely you knew...did you think it was a coincidence that both my grandparents died in 1942 in Treblinka? And yet, Rocky had not known. She thought they died in the town, not the camp. She realizes she was both sheltered and, perhaps, willfully ignorant. Mort goes on to tell his own story of learning about his grandparents’ fate, in the same way of not being told directly by the adults in his life and yet becoming increasingly aware based on overhead conversations and grief and awareness of then current events as heard on the radio. Poignantly, he notes that he and his brother were still kids and just mostly interested in playing childish things, like playing stickball, and not very attentive to the war. Later, Rocky returns to this revelatory moment, wondering if epigenetics (inherited trauma) might have informed her own anxiety and actions.

*Sandwich*’s small but significant focus on inherited trauma speaks to the Jewish experience of the children and grandchildren of survivors and the children and grandchildren of earlier American Jewish immigrants, who were not so directly impacted, a cause of everyone wondering, why am I here? Why was I saved? “It is a privilege to grow old. We are lucky to be here,” says Rocky’s father, and she cries, “because of the conversation and the wine and this absolute devastation and blessedness, rolled up into a lump in [her] own throat that [she] has been trying to swallow for [her] own life.”

Appealing to readers of Nora Ephron, *Sandwich* is recommended for popular fiction collections in public and synagogue libraries.

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


This collection of ten short stories by Chava Rosenfarb (1923-2011), an important, award-winning Yiddish writer from Lodz, Poland, focuses on the afterlife of Holocaust survivors living in Canada. The stories were written between 1974 and 1995. Most were originally published in the Yiddish literary journal, *Di Goldene Keyt*. Rosenfarb, a Holocaust survivor, explores the pain, confusion and anger in the lives of those who, like herself, arrived in Canada after the war.

The book includes a useful, insightful introduction, as well as a bibliography of the Yiddish publication of the stories. The translator, Professor Emerita of English Literature at the University of Lethbridge, has published numerous translations from Yiddish to English, as well as most of Chava Rosenfarb’s work. The stories are powerfully written and provide a glimpse into the traumatic impact of the Holocaust on survivors who found safe haven in North America. The book is a valuable addition to the body of work by Yiddish women writers. It is recommended for collections in Jewish public, secondary school, academic and synagogue libraries.

Sally Stieglitz, AJL News and Reviews Editor in Chief

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

Continued on page 33

Equal part political thriller and historical mystery, *The Boy with the Star Tattoo* takes place over several decades (1940s-1960s) in France and Israel, following the interwoven stories of several main characters: Claudette, a disabled French seamstress who falls in love with a Jewish man during WWII and is then separated from her infant son; Uzi, an Israeli who works in post-war France to find Jewish children and to bring them to Palestine (as Israel was then known); and Sharon, a young woman in 1960s Israel, devastated by the loss of her fiance, who is recruited to partake in the Israeli Navy’s covert ship building efforts in Cherbourg, France. Two important historical narratives take center stage: The Boats of Cherbourg, a nail-biting Israeli military operation, and Youth Aliyah, a Jewish children’s rescue organization. The story of the separated boy/mother, while framing the narrative, is somewhat less compelling.

Author Talia Carner is a first generation Israeli and her deep knowledge of Israel’s country, culture, and internal struggles shine with authenticity throughout. The stories of French Jewish children post-Holocaust are fraught; the surviving children are variously deeply loved, neglected, and abused, and the decisions about how and when to bring them to Palestine are caught up in ethical considerations, practical concerns, and the competing interests of different Jewish organizations.

Recommended for synagogue and public library popular fiction collections and for book clubs.

**Sally Stieglitz**  
*Editor in Chief, AJL News and Reviews*

### Non-Fiction


Michael J. Alter’s deeply researched and thought-provoking exploration of the profound significance of names, highlights how they shape our understanding of the world around us. In this concise yet illuminating book, the name Israel is particularly meaningful in the context of its country, its people, and recent historic events. The book’s premise, that Hebrew names are not mere labels but the very essence of identity, is a compelling one. Alter’s literature review demonstrates that names predate the existence of the things they identify, emphasizing that names are not just linguistic constructs but powerful forces that influence our perception. This central idea resonates throughout the book, challenging readers to reevaluate their understanding of names and their impact on our lives.

Throughout the book, Alter skillfully weaves together history, theology, and linguistic analysis to demonstrate the significance of the name Israel. He delves into the biblical origins of the name, exploring its cultural and religious implications, referencing patriarchs’ and matriarchs’ names as guidance. Connecting historical events with linguistic concepts is remarkable, making the book accessible even to those with limited background knowledge. Most notable is the incorporation of the traditional four levels of Jewish study, *Pardes* (a mnemonic for the four types of biblical exegesis, *pesesh*, *remez*, *derash*, and *sod*). One of the book’s strengths is its brevity, condensing complex ideas into a concise and engaging narrative.

The author’s writing style is clear and accessible, making it an excellent choice for both scholars, Jewish educators, and general readers interested in the subject. This is a compelling and thought-provoking book that invites readers to ponder the profound influence of names on our perception of reality. Exploring the name Israel through this intriguing journey brings one to appreciate the power of the name Israel.

**Etta D. Gold,**  
*Temple Beth Am, Miami, Florida*


This title, Volume 5 of the *JPS Bible Commentary on Psalms,* is the first one to be published in the Series *Psalms.* It covers Psalms 120-150, the last section of the Psalter. (There will be four more volumes to be published.) Psalms 120-150 is not a single unified collection but there are some groups, most notably the “Psalms of Ascents” (Psalms 120-134) to which Adele Berlin, emerita Professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Maryland, contributes a full, separate chapter. Beside Berlin’s general introduction to the Psalter, there is also an introduction by Professor Sommer on the “sidebars,” the notes that Sommer wrote on the use of specific psalms in traditional Jewish liturgy in the principal rites. Berlin’s commentary on individual psalms begins with an introduction situating the psalm in its historical context (Berlin dates most of them as post-exilic) followed by
an explanation of specific verses in the psalm. Berlin’s commentary often points out the poetry in the verse, showing its formal composition, bringing citations from other parts of the Hebrew Bible to compare. The language is clear, accessible to readers with limited knowledge of Hebrew and avoids specialized vocabulary (if a specialized literary form is described by a technical term, a lay-person explanation is available in parenthesis).

This Volume is recommended for Judaic and academic libraries.

Roger S. Kohn, 
Silver Spring, MD


His book presents over fifty-eight powerful photographs from respected archival collections. These are “silent witnesses” to the Holocaust, and each is a powerful visual accompanied by a meaningful literary work — a poem, a short story, or an essay. The list of contributors is impressive and very diverse from all over the world. Their words are impressive accompaniments for every one of the pictures.

Topics of entries range from the rise of Nazism and the fast-swelling antisemitism to forced labor, and the ghettos. There are sections on escape, rescue, and resistance and on the post-Holocaust period. As an example, a poem from the last section is, “Aftermath,” by the poet Myra Sklarew. She asks in the first two stanzas, “Trauma, where do you live in us? How do we seal you into a container that you may not consume us?” And she ends with “I believed I had the right to live. Or Josef’s words: Hate destroys the hater.” (A long explanation of who Josef was and her contribution.) The incisive photograph at the head of the poem is of a four-year-old survivor of Buchenwald sitting on a United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) truck that speaks volumes.

The main purpose of this work is to help ensure that the Holocaust is remembered. Each contribution is powerful and heartbreaking to read.

The book can be an excellent source for teachers of the Holocaust. Therefore, it is recommended for every school and synagogue library as well as academic libraries where the Holocaust is taught.

Michlean L. Amir, 
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Retired)


Rabbi Sally Priesand, in 1972, was the first female rabbi publicly ordained, and this book is dedicated to the Vatikot (the first-generation veteran Reform women rabbis), as a celebration of all the women ordained from 1972 to 1983. The collection of short essays and poems, none longer than two-pages, are split into three sections. One of the first essays is from Rabbi Priesand herself reflecting on her opening of the doors for female rabbis. Several other members of the Vatikot also provide reflections of their experiences as well as their inspirations.

Many discuss the impact these earlier achievements had on those following, and the new reality for one who went from wanting to be a Rabbi’s wife, to becoming a Rabbi herself. The last section is the aspirations of what is to come, and how already seminary programs and the approaches to Judaism itself are changing by the impact of a more inclusive rabbinate, one that accepts all genders and those who have historically been silenced or excluded. The First Fifty Years includes a Yiddish and Hebrew glossary. This title is recommended for all libraries.

Sean Patrick Boyle, 
Librarian, Congregation Kneseth Israel, Allentown, PA, Vice President, President-elect, Association of Jewish Libraries


Biblical Women Speak is a well-organized and researched book that presents midrash and classical commentary on a group of selected women in the Torah. The author’s own contemporary midrashim are included and reflect a feminist viewpoint.

The book describes a sisterhood of women involved in saving Moses. These are Pharaoh’s daughters, Shiphrah and Puah (often associated with Jochebed and Miriam), and Amat (slave of Pharaoh’s daughter). Batya, Pharaoh’s daughter, is the rescuer of the child, Moses. While she is often referred to as Batya, meaning
daughter of Yah (daughter of God), she has other names which appear in non-rabbinic sources.

The author’s feminist viewpoint is evident in the story of Shelomith Bat Dibri. Her son was killed for being a blasphemer. Interestingly, Shelomith is the only woman mentioned in Leviticus by name. Feldman views her with sympathy and writes, “The ripples of violence swirl around Shelomith, from the taskmaster to her lover, to Moses, to her son, to the community that would stone her to death.”

_Biblical Women Speak_ is a good choice for a synagogue library or a reader interested in a feminist viewpoint. The book can be used in a variety of ways. It could be a reference source for Rabbis and educators. The author’s own modern _midrashim_ can be read as short stories and used by discussion groups or book clubs to spark questioning and further delve into these biblical women’s lives. Included in the book are a glossary, notes, and bibliography.


_Ellen Share_,
Washington Hebrew Congregation Children’s Librarian,
Washington, DC

Hartman, Jehuda, _Patriots without a Homeland: Hungarian Jewish Orthodoxy from the Emancipation to Holocaust_, Translated by Shaul Vardi. Academic Studies Press, 2023. The Lands and Ages of the Jewish People. 402 pp. $149.00 (9798887190280) HC.

This book covers Hungarian Jews from Emancipation to the Holocaust and seeks in part to understand why they failed to notice the impending annihilation. Depicted is an Orthodox community, which even amongst the most zealous Jews was patriotic, that felt rooted to the land. Hartman shows, despite the fact that Jews contributed greatly to the host culture as top scientists, writers, philosophers, and philanthropists, they were only to have their contributions rejected.

While Eichmann managed the logistics of transport of mass murder, it would not have been possible to locate so many Jews scattered across different places without the massive cooperation of official Hungarian governmental bodies. The Arrow Cross were “eager beavers” as Gotz Ally phrases it, to describe what later Goldhagen conveys by the phrase “Hitler’s willing executioners.”

While the study of Orthodox Judaism in Eastern Europe tends to focus on _balakbic_ questions and on the ideological struggles with other Jewish streams, with an emphasis on the internal Jewish arena, this book seeks to examine the conduct of Hungarian Orthodoxy in the external arena. Through rabbinic literature, memoirs, and press, it exposes the changes that occurred in the perception and attitudes of different Orthodox groups.

The first part concentrates on various stages in the rapprochement of Orthodoxy to Hungarian nationhood. The second part examines Orthodox attitudes towards antisemitism. The research illuminates the complex path by which Orthodox Jews underwent towards self perception as an integral part of the Hungarian nation.

The book makes a positive contribution to modern Jewish history, particularly, Hungarian Jewry, the emergence of Orthodox Judaism, and the relationship between Jews and other citizens from emancipation to Holocaust.

_Patriots without a Homeland_ is recommended for all Judaic scholarly collections.

David B Levy,
New York


Eva Hoffman's beautifully executed diminutive book is part of the Princeton University Press series about literary giants by literary greats. Hoffman and Milosz hailed from Poland, though both left their homeland for the West. In spite of that, Milosz is considered one of Poland’s greatest 20th century writers who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1980. His writings are responses to witnessing many of the tragedies of the 20th century, including the world wars and during the Holocaust, in Lithuania and in Warsaw.

Hoffman interviewed Milosz extensively for two days after he received the prize for a _New York Times_ profile that she wrote. The book is a definitive work on a beloved, highly respected writer who struggled with displacement, exile, first in “the Other” Europe, and then in the United States. His body of work is enormous in scope and variety. He wrote essays, novels, political reflections but above all, poetry. Hoffman admits that she could not cover all the works of Milocz in the book, but she succeeded in presenting a complex person and including many quotes from his works. His autobiography, _Native Realm_, is another excellent and extensive window into this complex, brilliant person.

The book should be in every academic library for its literary brilliance as well as its historical importance.

Michlean L. Amir,
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Retired)

This wide-ranging collection of thirty-six short essays and poems by leading Jewish thinkers from a diversity of backgrounds and positions is part of the CCAR Challenge and Change Series. It focuses on contemporary Jewish responses and reflections on the global ecological crisis, prophetic, pastoral, practical and personal. Each contribution includes bibliographic notes and comments. The book is divided into five broad sections: theology, Jewish texts, encountering the divine, sacred time and personal. Each contribution includes a short introduction to each of the sections, a general introduction and biographical information about each of the contributors. The book also includes a three page forward by Karenna Gore, which sets the tone for the rest of the book. It is an important and valuable contribution to Jewish scholarship relating to climate change, the environment and social action.

This book has broad appeal, is appropriate and recommended for a wide audience, in all types of Judaica collections and Jewish libraries.

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


This excellent academic collection of fifteen essays shows the deep interest and long history of engagement with Hebrew language, in turn playing significant relations between Judaism and Christianity by tracing chronologically the place of Hebrew in antiquity, middle ages, and modernity amongst Christians and Jews, putting in dialogue theologians, historians, linguists, and others with one another.

Hebrew language is revelatory and sacred (loshon kodesh — “holy tongue”) from which according to Sefer ha-zohar, G-d created. (yesh mi-ayin — “something from nothing”) the heavens and earth, and which Adam and Chava communicated in Gan Eden. For Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, Hebrew makes Jews unique as a vehicle of prophecy.

Hebrew nourishes Christianity as a tributary from the mother religion upon which it is built. Thus Christians with knowledge of Hebrew share a common heritage and mutual engagement.

In Midrash Tehillim, Rabbi Yonatan, says, there are “four languages: Latin for battle, Greek for song, Persian for lamentation, and Hebrew for prayer.” In subsequent diasporas, Jews would adopt other languages such as Judeo-Arabic, Ladino and Yiddish. However, Hebrew was always the root, foundation, source (Quellen/mikor) to which to return to as the eternal language.

Resnick in his essay, “Lingua sacra et diabolica,” shows that during the medieval period Hebrew provoked fear amongst Christians, owing to its perceived magical power. Popes employed Jewish physicians who were thought to be capable of exorcizing demons, curing illnesses, and providing bodily protection.

Campanini in his essay, “Learning Hebrew in the Renaissance,” is correct that the esoteric lore of Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) drew many Christians to engage in learning Hebrew during the Renaissance.

Halperin’s essay, “Sacredness and Profanity,” points to Zionism reestablishing Hebrew as a mother tongue, weaning Ashkenaz Jews off the “mamaloshen” Yiddish, for the modern Israeli state, transforming Hebrew into a secularized vernacular.

Recommended for all academic libraries.

David B Levy, New York


From 1930 to 1970, Maurice Samuel was one of the premiere Jewish public intellectuals in the United States. Since his death in 1972, however, he has been forgotten, although his books remain in many synagogue and university libraries. In this book, Alan Levenson has given an overview of Samuel’s life and work.

Levenson recounts Samuel’s early life. Born in Romania, he spent most of his youth in Manchester, England. He emigrated to the United States in 1914 and lived here for most of his life. The remainder of the volume divides his work into four segments: his Zionism, advocacy for Yiddish literature, his treatise on antisemitism, and his writings on the Bible.

Samuel’s career as a promoter of Zionism, began in the 1920s and continued through the Six-Day War. He was an advocate of Yiddish literature, especially as a translator and promoter of Sholem Asch, Sholom Aleichem and I. L. Peretz. Levenson reviews Samuel’s more general work, including his autobiographical I, the Jew and The Great Hatred, his major statement on antisemitism.
He analyzes Samuel’s writings on the Hebrew Bible, his friendship with Mark Van Doren, and Certain People of the Book, his personal commentary on characters in Jewish text. In addition to his extensive publications, Samuel was a popular lecturer on Jewish topics, speaking in synagogues and at conferences around the country.

Samuel called himself “an employee of the Jewish people,” and the moniker seems appropriate. Levenson has presented both a useful short biography and a critical analysis of Maurice Samuel’s half-century as author and active Zionist. Levenson captures his subject’s extensive interests and passionate curiosity. As a summary of mid-century Jewish thought through one important life, this book should be considered by all scholarly collections.

Fred Isaac, Oakland, CA


Star Crossed depicts the cultural history of Paris and the Holocaust in France. The authors, Macadam and Worrall, read over 80 letters and did extensive interviews in compiling information for this book. Star Crossed is a true story, but the love story embedded in the book almost sounds like a fictional account. This page-turner tells the story of Annette Zelman, a Jewish woman, who lived in Paris during the Nazi occupation. She revels in the excitement of meeting famous writers and artists and the Bohemian atmosphere in Paris. Annette falls in love with a Catholic poet and artist, Jean Jausion. Despite the opposition by their families to the union, they remain devoted to each other and face together the Nazis occupation of Paris. Annette, ignoring the ominous signs, doesn’t leave the city when her family leaves. Sadly, she experienced the irreversible repercussions of a Jew staying in Paris. The ending of the book has an unexpected twist relating to her capture and reveals the worst in human behavior.

Star Crossed is an excellent choice for a book club and is highly recommended for public and synagogue libraries. For those interested in these subjects, a current TV series, World On Fire, produced by Masterpiece Theater, has scenes depicting life in Paris during WWII.

Ellen Share, Washington Hebrew Congregation Children’s Librarian, Washington, DC


This title mainly addresses secular Yiddish speakers in Canada in the last seventy years. Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Canadian Jews are only mentioned in contrast with these secular Yiddish speakers in Canada. The six chapters of Yiddish Lives On are chronologically listed, discussing one aspect for each decade. Some Canadian families, in Montreal specifically, have three generations of Yiddish speakers during this seventy-year period. Writers born in Europe continued to write and publish in Yiddish until the early 1980s, while the children of Holocaust survivors participated in Yiddish language theater and became fluent. The more recent generations from the 1990s onward, are still learning their Yiddish from singing, the new media and motion pictures. The book contains an appendix of Yiddish language books published by Canadian Yiddishists.

This title is highly recommended to academic libraries interested in the Yiddish language and Canadian secular Yiddishists.

Roger S. Kohn, Silver Spring, MD


“A field is born,” proclaims co-editor Alyssa Quint in her introduction to this volume. With the Yiddish theater, as in other domains, scholars are increasingly drawing our attention to the women who have made their mark there. Women and men have shared the stage in equal numbers practically since its inception. Quint observes. Moreover, participation of women extends behind the scenes, where they have also served as directors, impresarios, and creators. The topical, chronological, and geographic scope of the twelve essays in this pioneering collection is quite impressive. The theater personalities treated in this nicely illustrated volume include major stars alongside overlooked figures.

Topics covered include: memoirs by the New York stars Bessie Thomashefsky, Bertha Kalich, and Sarah Adler; the modern dance aesthetic of the choreographer Judith Berg; cross-dressing performers in London’s Yiddish music halls; Molly Picon’s remarkable
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

skills as a song lyricist; the American Yiddish actress, singer, and 
radio host Miriam Kressyn; Sofia Erdi and Rachel Berger, two 
actresses and impresarios in interwar Lithuania; the acclaim 
and subsequent neglect surrounding the Vilna Troupe’s premier 
actress Sonia Alomis; a feminist interpretation of Argentinean 
Yiddish theater history; the South African Yiddish actress and 
impresario Sarah Sylvia; Ida Kaminska’s productions of Bertolt 
Brecht’s Mother Courage in post-1945 Poland; Diana Blumenfeld, 
a Polish Yiddish actress who pursued her career even in the Warsaw 
Ghetto; and the Romanian mother-daughter pair, Dina Koenig 
and Lya Koenig-Stolper (whose Yiddish performing career extends 
to the streaming era, in Shtisel).

Reflecting the collaborative and transnational nature of Yiddish 
theater studies, contributors to this volume include academics, 
independent scholars, artists, musicians, and librarians from three 
continents. Highly recommended for research libraries.

Zachary M. Baker, 
Stanford University Libraries (retired librarian), 
Palo Alto, CA

Robinson, Ira. “A Link in the Great American Chain”: Studies 
in the Evolution of the Orthodox Jewish Community in 
Cleveland, Ohio. Academic Studies Press, 2023. 152 pp. $139 
(9788887191515) HC.

Robinson’s A Link in the Great American Chain is a collection 
of six essays that Robinson published in various places over the years. 
Primarily covering a time span of the 1920s through the 1940s, it traces the 
history of the Orthodox Jewish community of Cleveland during a turbulent 
time in America. The first two essays being a more general history of Orthodox Judaism and Cleveland, it is the later four that make this book interesting. Becoming slightly more niche, this deeper dive into this community gives us a picture of not just Orthodox Judaism, but 
American Judaism as a whole.

As well researched as A Link in the Great American Chain is, it is perhaps too niche for most collections to purchase. For public libraries and synagogues in the Cleveland area, it might be worth having a copy. For those outside of Cleveland, it is hard to recommend simply because the book is so narrow. It is a well written and researched book with a singular focus.

Andrew Lillien, 
AJL Treasurer, 
Baltimore, MD

Rocca, Samuele. In the Shadow of the Caesars: Jewish Life in Roman 
345 pp. $175.00 (9789004517042) HC.

n a world in which they were surrounded, first by Roman polytheists and later by Roman Christians, Jews were obliged to respond to the cultural and legal challenges posed by their circumstances. Whereas many have suggested that they lived estranged from those around them, Samuele Rocca argues that the Jews of Rome lived in constant contact with, and were heavily influenced by, their neighbors. To substantiate his claims, he provides a comprehensive examination of the demography and geography of the Jewish communities in Roman Italy. He also challenges some long held rationales for the development of antisemitism in the Roman World. Rocca cites Rosemary Ruether, who claims that Christianity was the major basis for antisemitism in the Roman world. Christians felt threatened by what Ruether described as “sibling-rivalry.” This rivalry stemmed from Jewish challenges to Christian interpretations of scriptures, as well as Jewish questioning the messiahship of Jesus. Rocca considers that, in response to the changes that occurred over time in the Roman world, the Jews of Rome followed two paths. Some strove to affirm their individuality and particularism as a group, while others quietly assimilated. Because of its uninhibited antisemitism, the rise of Christianity required a re-assessment of these responses. Subsequent Barbarian invasions resulted in still different responses. Rather than dissolving in violence as did the Jews in Alexandria, or simply fading away like those in Asia Minor, Jews in the Roman world underwent what Rocca calls a “metamorphosis.” He explains that: “Jewish self-awareness was reshaped and rebuilt anew to fit the new challenges confronting them.”

Rocca has provided an exhaustive examination of Jewish life in the Roman world. With an extensive bibliography and indexes, his book would be a valuable addition to any academic library.

Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante, 
Herkimer, NY

Sciar, David, editor. The Golden Path: Maimonides Across 
(9781802077889) PBK.

Maimonides is probably the most famous rabbinic figure in Jewish history. A recent exhibition at the Yeshiva University Museum featuring the famed scholar, doctor, and philosopher deftly showed how the legacy of Moshe ben

This highly scholarly book, meant for an academic audience already well-acquainted with the subject, is the translation from the original German monograph, published in Europe (Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar) in 2019 by Böhlau Verlag. The author, Klavdia Smola, is professor and chair of Slavic Literatures at the University of Dresden, Germany, with several recent publications focused on diverse aspects of Soviet and Russian culture and literary expression. The 2023 English rendering of *Reinventing Tradition* is part of the ongoing series, *Jews of Russia & Eastern Europe and Their Legacy*. Professor Smola appears to have read or consulted nearly everything germane to her topic, with “Reinventing Tradition” containing a 42 page bibliography divided into two parts, “Literary Works,” and “Research Literature.” The language employed in Professor Smola’s analyses can, at points, be difficult to follow or understand and may well deter even the committed academic reader from reading through the entire volume. At a number of points, she summarizes the trends and directions she discerns and provides extensive citations from the works cited (in both the original Russian and in English translation). The reader, thanks to the author’s deep dive into the literary works she brings forward to make her case, will come away from this book with a recognition and appreciation of the work of a number of well-regarded (although not widely known) authors, whether resident in Russia, Israel, the US or elsewhere, concerned with Jewish identity as shaped and perceived through Soviet and Russian experience.

Professor Smola sees the encounter of Soviet and Russian Jewish intellectuals with their Jewish heritage through the prism of what she terms “Reinventing Tradition,” which she sees as going through diverse phases responding to the continuing changes in the nature of Soviet and Russian life in varied realms – political, social, economic, and importantly, ideological. The constant she identifies is that of “Reinventing Tradition” creating, as well as discovering, a sense of connection, to the Jewish past and present, with an eye, as well, to a Jewish future.

Some sense of the elaborate intellectual thread underlying Professor Smola’s dense and complex work is provided by several sentences in her book’s concluding chapter:

Perhaps for the first time after Isaak Babel’s death [1940]...the Jewish underground and emigration literature begins to draw its images and ideas from various cultural sources. Not only Babel and I’la Erenburg [both influential Soviet Jewish writers], but also the maskilic satire, the Hasidic midrash, and the Jewish travel narratives become important reference texts, allusions to which become a sign of literary belonging.

In her book’s final paragraph she concludes, “The attempt to revitalize the museified knowledge, driven by nostalgia, a joy of rediscovery and subversive artistic energy, has become the main concern of Jewish literatures after the disasters of twentieth century history, first of all the Shoah.”

*Reinventing Tradition* is a distinguished contribution to the understanding of this revitalization and rediscovery, looking to make the search by Soviet and Russian Jewish authors more widely known and a source of insight and wisdom to be brought near.

Mindy C. Reiser, Ph.D.
Vice President, Jewish Study Center, Washington, DC


Touro has launched a new medical journal to cover topics in Jewish medical and *halachic* issues. Viewing medical issues through the lens of Jewish law and custom requires a unique combination of competence in both fields. Some concepts of *Shabbat* observance and *pekuah nefesh* (saving of a life) are learned by everyone. However, most rabbinc decisions will have complex or technical answers based on a level of understanding of medicine and Jewish law. When community issues are at stake and situations are murky,
the amount of study and investigation requires top rated medical scholars and halakhists.

While the concepts of halacha from the Talmud and codes of Jewish law are considered constant, our science and understanding of the world influences how the law is applied. The concept “to save a life” needs the understanding of modern medicine to determine what is life-threatening. Scientists including physicians are trained in evidence-based understanding of disease and treatments, while Jewish law interpretations may use personal experience or other non-evidence-based concepts for a ruling.

This volume concentrates on articles concerning issues that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic — questions of risk, rationing of resources, standards of care, and medical uncertainty. Some articles put historical and social context to issues. The last chapter on the Black Plague was particularly fascinating because it reveals some common misconceptions; for example, there is no real evidence that the death rate among Jews was different from the general population.

This is a readable scholarly book for experts. It is well written and is highly recommended for all libraries who have scholarly materials in medicine and halacha.

Daniel D. Stuhlmans, 
Temple Sholom of Chicago, 
Chicago, IL

Physicist Tuchman (PhD, Yale) explores two aspects of Maimonides’ concept of God that he thinks are difficult or impossible to reconcile with classical physics. First, is a perfect God, who performs miracles (i.e., suspends the natural law that governs the universe). A perfect God presumably creates a perfect universe so why are there exceptions made to interfere with the natural law that governs it? Also, how is it sensible for people to offer petitionary prayer, asking God to do certain things rather than being content with how things will unfold in the universe that a perfect God has created? Dr. Tuchman turns to quantum mechanics, which is less rigid than classical physics, predicting probabilities rather than the certainties of classical physics. Secondly, Dr. Tuchman thinks that it is difficult to understand how rational but finite beings such as humans can enter into a relationship with an infinite God. The barriers between the divine and physical realms seem too great. But the author explains, “Quantum mechanics has experimentally proven” that it is possible to enter “an inaccessible regime” in the physical universe. He maintains that this can provide a metaphorical way to think about pursuing knowledge of, and establishing a relationship with, the infinite God. His illustrations of this using the Bible and rabbinical texts is fascinating and is the strongest part of the book.

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

Roni Weinstein. Joseph Karo and Shaping of Modern Jewish Law: 
The Early Modern Ottoman and Global Settings. Anthem Press, 2022. 
Anthem Intercultural Transfer Studies. 256 pp. $125.00 (9781785278761) HC.

The work of Rabbi Joseph Karo’s Shulhan ’Arukh has arguably shaped Jewish law since its first printing in the mid-16th century. Roni Weinstein’s new book aims to situate Karo’s work and legal framing within an Ottoman context by comparing various aspects of Karo’s halakha to Ottoman legal traditions, both religious and political. It is an interesting perspective on the law, but would have benefited from a closer read on the historical Jewish legal context as well. The author is clearly well-versed in Ottoman law, but it was surprising to see a lack of engagement with other works on Karo, such as Edward Fram’s The Codification of Jewish Law on the Cusp of Modernity, which was published at roughly the same time. That being said, the comparisons are quite interesting, and show many similarities between aspects of law across various cultures.

This title is recommended for historical and comparative law collections.

Michelle Margolis, 
Columbia University, New York, NY, 
AJL President

Zaltzman, Hillel. The Jewish Underground of Samarkand: How 
$29.95 (9781942134923) PBK.

This is an autobiography that is a fascinating account of courage and faith under the horrific oppression of Stalinism. Like thousands of Jews from Ukraine and neighboring areas during WWII, the Zaltzman family fled to Samarkand in Uzbekistan when the author was three years old. He weaves a gripping story of his family’s survival from the Bolshevik
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR ADULTS

The Jewish Underground of Samarkand

Rabbi Hillel Zaltzman

reviewed until they received permission to emigrate to Israel. The Zaltzman family were Chabad Chassidim, followers of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, with a small group of like-minded devotees, went through extraordinary lengths to keep their strict observance of Torah: ensuring kosher mikvahs and meat, conducting secret circumcisions, prayer minyanim and other key rituals, establishing religious schools and adult classes, avoiding public school attendance and work on the Sabbath and holidays, all while living in dread of prying neighbors, the secret police, and the state itself. The twenty chapters are filled with inspirational characters, and demonstrations of unflinching courage, resourcefulness, and determination.

This is a new revised and shortened edition of the 2015 work Samarkand: The Underground with a Far-Reaching Impact, which ran for over 700 pages. The new edition is less dense with better editing and a smoother translation from the Hebrew making it an easier read. It is helpful to have some familiarity with Jewish rituals and culture. The Jewish Underground of Samarkand is recommended for high school, synagogue, and college and research libraries.

Diane Mizrachi, PhD.,
Charles E. Young Research Library,
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