A Sydney Taylor 2024 Book Awards Retrospective

By William Stieglitz

A tween witch about to have her bat mitzvah; time traveling kids protecting baby Moses as he floats down the Nile; school pranks at a yeshiva gone too far; an eleven year old Jewish immigrant starting a new life on the American prairie in 1905 — all these and more are topics you can find in the books recognized during the Sydney Taylor Book Awards back in January. The awards ceremony, held as part of the ALA Youth Media Awards during the annual LibLearnX convention, was full of excitement. Attendees were primed by the AJL get-together the night before, where both attendees and non-attendees of the ALA convention alike showed up to schmooze while noshing on vegetables and hummus. By the time AJL president Michelle Margolis presented the awards, those there for the Sydney Taylor reveals were cheering full energy while waving blue pom-poms in the air.

Altogether, eighteen books were recognized, including three Gold Medal Winners, eleven Silver Medal Honorees, three Notable Books of Jewish Content, and one Manuscript Award for a not yet published novel. Looking closely at the chosen books, common themes and patterns can be found across the high-quality Jewish stories for young readers. Jewish

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holidays and historical figures were a big focus in selected picture books, such as Afikomen, Hanukkah Upside Down, The Rabbi and His Donkey, and Picture Book winner Two New Years. Middle Grade winner The Dubious Pranks of Shaindy Goodman, set during Yom Kippur, can be described as a Jewish holiday book too, as Shaindy must decide whether or not to forgive a friend as the Day of Atonement approaches. It’s a story of deciding who you want to grow up to be, a theme echoed in other selected titles, such as The Jake Show. A Middle Grade honoree, the book shows a kid of newly divorced parents playing the role of Yaakov for his Orthodox mother and Jacob for his Conservative father, but finding the “real Jake” he wants to be through his friends.

Other middle grade books like Don’t Want to be Your Monster and The Witch of Woodland tell fantasy stories, while titles like Not So Shy and A Sky Full of Song tell stories about kids confronting antisemitism. Ava’s Golem, the Middle Grade winner of the Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award, fits in both categories. Told in two voices, the novel follows the friendship of teenagers Ava and Joseph, the latter of whom is a golem she made, but with his own story to tell.

Interestingly, this middle grade title was not the only recognized book to feature a teen golem as a main character. Wrath Becomes Her, a YA honoree, follows Vera, a golem created with the face and memories of the dead girl she is built to avenge, as she must decide if her purpose is just to fight, or if she deserves a life beyond what she was made for. Set during the Holocaust, it joins other YA honorees Courage to Dream: Tales of Hope in the Holocaust and Impossible Escape: A True Story of Survival and Heroism in Nazi Europe, as well as YA winner The Blood Years, in exploring the crisis from the perspectives of the real and imagined teens who lived through it. The Picture Book honoree, Hidden Hope: How a Toy and a Hero Saved Lives During the Holocaust, also approaches this point in history, telling the story of a real-life member of the French Resistance who, traveling under the guise of a social worker, delivered life-saving papers (hidden inside a toy duck) to Jews in hiding.

It’s worth noting too, that while the Sydney Taylor Awards are focused on Jewish stories, our Jewish identities of course overlap with many others, and this was reflected in the selected books. Ava’s Golem, described earlier, explores topics related to neurodiversity. Two New Years presents a family celebrating both Rosh Hashana and the Chinese Lunar New Year. Zhen Yu and the Snake, based on the Talmudic tale of Rabbi Akiva’s daughter, also tells a story that is both Jewish and Chinese, showing how a young girl’s mitzvah ends up saving her own life. And Going Bicoastal, a YA honor book, follows a bi teen in two versions of her life: one where she spends the summer with her dad in NYC and finally talks to the girl she’s been crushing on, and one where she spends it with her mom in LA and meets the guy she never saw coming.

The final and perhaps biggest award to mention is the Body of Work Award, which went to publisher Joni Sussman of Kar-Ben Publishing, for her varied and high-quality contributions to the genre of Jewish children’s literature over the last twenty years. The entirety of the awards was a success for Kar-Ben publishing overall, which had published three of the aforementioned recognized books. Other notable publishers were HarperCollins, which had published four recognized titles, and MacMillan and ABRAMS, which each published two.

For authors and illustrators of the winning books, the celebration will continue this June at the annual AJL conference in San Diego, where they will officially receive their awards. Additionally, Gold and Silver Medalists were able to participate in the Sydney Taylor Blog Tour from February 5 to February 9. For more information about the Blog Tour, you can visit the AJL website at https://jewishlibraries.org/2024-blog-tour-sydney-taylor-book-awards/.

From the Editor

Dear Safranim,

I am happy to share a new issue of News and Reviews with you! You may have noticed that we are now identifying each issue by season, rather than by secular months...as a quarterly publication, this change makes sense and also reflects the importance of seasons in the Jewish calendar.

This Spring 2024 issue features recent AJL happenings, including a reflection on the Sydney Taylor Awards/Youth Media Awards at LibLearnX2024 and chapter chatter on the newly active AJL NYMA’s docent-led tour of the Maimonides exhibit at the Yeshiva University Museum.

We also have A Who Knows 4? Interview with Trevan Hatch, who recently joined the News and Reviews team as the incoming Co-editor of Reviews for Adults, updates on the Nice Jewish Books podcast, and AJL endowment updates from Jackie Ben-Efraim and Jerry Krautman, who are doing spectacular work on our behalf. Yasher koach Jackie and Jerry!

Other contributions include an article on former Yugoslav Jewish libraries and collections and an engaging look at the trend of recipes on gravestones from TikTok influencer and librarian Rosie Grant, recently of American Jewish University.

Our reviews of children’s, teens, and adult books are the mainstay of this publication and not to be missed! Thank you to departing Co-editor of Reviews for Adults, Laura Schutzman, who is stepping down after years of service. Laura, we appreciate you!

We welcome contributions of articles and reviews of books. If you are interested in participating in our community of writers or reviewers, please email me at stiegelitz@ilrc.org to discuss opportunities. Our community is our strength!

Warm Spring regards,
Sally
Revisiting the Ex-Yugoslav Jewish Libraries and Collections

BY BILJANA ALBAHARI, LIBRARY CONSULTANT (NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SERBIA), AND ANA ĆIRIĆ PAVLOVIĆ, HISTORIAN AND THE CLAIMS CONFERENCE SAUL KAGAN DOCTORAL FELLOW (ELTE UNIVERSITY, BUDAPEST)

Our Association of Jewish Libraries (AJL) journey started in 2021 when Biljana Albahari and Ana Ćirić Pavlović participated in a panel Portals to Judaica Content at the AJL Digital Conference, moderated by Amalia S. Levi. It was an onset of Biljana and Ana’s friendship, cooperation, but also an incentive for local initiatives aspiring to connect regional librarians and other professionals working on Judaica collections. Biljana, a librarian and founder of the Jewish Digital Library online repository, continued participating in various AJL initiatives, including a mapping project of Jewish libraries around the world, as well as promoting ex-Yugoslav Judaica holdings via online seminars. In one such event in March 2023, four institutions from Serbia (Historical Archives of Belgrade, Jewish Historical Museum, Jewish Digital Library, and Tikkun) presented their Jewish collections. As a historian, Ana researches the restitution of Jewish property, including the Nazi-looted Judaica and art in the former Yugoslavia.

- Presenting the Library and Archives Collection of the Jewish Community of the Ex-Yugoslav Countries was a session at
the AJL Digital Conference 2023: A World of Possibilities wherein several participants exhibited Jewish archival and librarian collections from the former Yugoslavia. The presentations were as follows: Biljana Albahari “Significant Jewish Collections in Ex-Yugoslav Countries”; Tamara Butigan-Vučaj “Digital Collection ‘Jewish Periodicals’ in the National Library of Serbia”; Olga Unga “For Future Studies: Jewish Life in Novi Sad and the South Bačka Region”; Ana Lebl and Margita Mirčeta Zakarija “Jewish Community of Split-History and Heritage Collections”; and Marjetka Bedrač “The Creation of Isserlein’s Library.” The session was moderated by Ana Ćirić Pavlović. As all of us agreed that participation at the conference was an excellent experience deciding to make a joint evaluation; thus, these are some main common thoughts that emerged:

• Participation at the AJL digital conference for our group was a beneficial experience both personally and professionally. The Conference provided an opportunity to introduce our work to the worldwide association of Jewish libraries, as well as to network with related organizations, especially from the former Yugoslavia, which are also developing Judaica library collections. Also, we devoted substantial time, initiated by the AJL conference, to rethink the library and archive policies, plans, and programs, getting in touch with some institutions, regionally and abroad, and maintaining the constant communication among co-panelists. A genuine advantage of this conference was that participants themselves became more aware of the necessity of mutual cooperation, gaining a more articulated vision of the future, locally and regionally alike. As the panel moderator Ana Ćirić Pavlović stressed, participants obtained useful feedback regarding their projects but also had the opportunity to become better acquainted with the projects of other ex-Yugoslav Jewish communities. As they share not only a common history and language but also many similar challenges, further cooperation among them would certainly be beneficial. This conference was an opportunity for personal growth for all participants and prompted a desire for more collaboration in the region of ex-Yugoslavia.

• Since the AJL Conference is a global forum and that panel was attended by dozens of scholars and professionals from the Jewish Studies field, the Yugoslav group considers that our panel had two-fold impact. First of all, it significantly contributed to raising the awareness of the diversity and wealth of ex-Yugoslav Jewish collections. However, all panelists highlighted common challenges such as lack of staff, financial, and technical resources, as well as lack of appropriate study and research programs. All these reasons prevent us from working even more intensively and systematically on managing, organizing, and developing Judaica libraries in our institutions and countries. In addition, the participation at the conference generated the establishment of several connections and cooperative efforts between the presenters and other participants, mainly professionals from other libraries. The main asset for ex-Yugoslav participants was gaining knowledge about best practices of larger and well-organized libraries and collections, as well as those of other relevant institutions, particularly in the US.

• From a historical and practical point of view, the cooperation between Jewish libraries from the former Yugoslav countries is an idea that should be further developed. Our aim is to create a long-term, sustainable research infrastructure involving regional librarians and scholars of Jewish heritage. Based on participation at the AJL Conference, the first ideas for possible cooperation or joint projects have emerged through establishing a formal network of libraries, archives, and relevant collections in the region of former Yugoslavia, within and outside of Jewish communities. One of the goals is the tentative creation of a common platform, assembling catalogs of all Judaic items into a joint one.

• Moreover, due to the Holocaust and subsequent worldwide migration of the survivors, many locally relevant documents and Judaica are dispersed within Europe, the US, or elsewhere; thus the collaboration between various Jewish libraries could yield further progress in researching these small communities. Jewish archives and libraries in the US most notably possess many holdings related to Southeast Europe, therefore librarians from our region should first identify these documents or other Judaica and then find an appropriate mode of connecting with their US colleagues. We are looking forward to participating in the future events and many thanks to the AJL for the support!
Who Knows Four?  
Trevan Hatch

Trevan Hatch is the Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Ancient Scripture, Anthropology, Middle East Studies, Religious Studies, Jerusalem Center Librarian and Associate Librarian at Brigham Young University. He holds two doctoral degrees; a PhD in Jewish Studies from Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies in Chicago, IL, and a PhD in Social Sciences from Louisiana State University.

What do you like best about being a librarian? And a Judaica librarian?

Being an academic librarian is the best-kept secret in the academy. All day long I have the privilege of working with the topics/subjects I love the most: Jewish studies, Bible, Israel-Palestine, and religion. I’m either helping students with their assignments, helping faculty get what they need for their research, or doing my own research. As the religion librarian who has graduate training in Jewish studies, I LOVE the task of curating our Judaica collection at a non-Jewish library.

Do you prefer to read fiction or nonfiction? And do you have a favorite Jewish book?

I prefer to read non-fiction. I’m a hardboiled academic who prefers history, primary texts, and biblical studies over novels; however, I’m currently into reading about the Jewish roots of the comic book industry and many of our most beloved superheroes. One of my research interests is the hero-savior/chosen one motif throughout history (hence the superhero interest). As a result, one of my favorite books is Harris Lenowitz’s, The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights.

What is your favorite Pesach dish? Thoughts, if any, on gefilte fish?

As a non-Jewish person, I don’t have a long tradition of eating Pesach foods, but I have been in countless settings where I was served “Jewish dishes.” I love anything with lamb. I love pot roast. I love horseradish deviled eggs. And of course, challah bread!

As a new member, what do you hope to learn from our colleagues at AJL?

I can’t wait to deepen my knowledge base about the various research resources that I might not know about.
Nice Jewish Books Podcast... Still Going Strong!
Sheryl Stahl, AJL Webmaster and Podcaster

How long have you been doing this podcast?
It’s hard for me to believe, but I’ve been doing this for a little over two years now.

What was/is the biggest challenge?
I was surprised to find that the part I love the best is also the most challenging. Obviously, I’m a huge reader, but almost all my reading had been recreational. For the podcast, I do a deep reading of every book that I’m considering. Sometimes it is a lot of work for a book that I’ll end up not featuring on the podcast.

What kinds of books do you choose?
I like reading books in any genre, as long as they are Jewish. And before you ask, I consider a book Jewish if it has a character or characters who are Jewish in more than name only; if the story would be different or impossible if the character were not Jewish. I’d like to point out that the author does not have to be Jewish. I also tend to avoid Holocaust related books. I think there is so much more to the Jewish experience than the Holocaust, and I would like to highlight those other aspects.

Any favorite episodes?

Gravestone Recipes: Preserving Memories and Culinary Traditions
By Rosie Grant

Naomi Miller-Dawson’s Spritz Cookies
Yields two dozen or more

Ingredients
1 cup room temperature butter or margarine
¾ cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 egg
2 ¼ cups unsifted flour
½ teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon salt

In the quiet corners of cemeteries around the US, amid the solemnity of tombstones, a unique tradition quietly persists - gravestone recipes. These engraved culinary secrets, etched onto headstones, span generations, connecting us with the lives and passions of those who have passed on. My connection to recipe gravestones begins with Naomi Odessa Miller-Dawson, a woman laid to rest in Brooklyn’s Green-Wood Cemetery, and the spritz cookies she left behind.

Two years ago I embarked on a culinary journey, attempting to find and recreate beloved recipes carved on gravestones. Naomi was the first recipe I learned about, and one that I’ve attempted to recreate the most often. After over a dozen attempts, the cookies have evolved, though I doubt they could ever match the skill and devotion of the baker herself. Her gravestone has only the ingredients and no instructions, there is only so much space on an epitaph after all. I haven’t minded the sweet process, and even the failed attempts. As I pull batch after batch from the oven, I always savor the buttery aroma of baked dough, thankful for the forgiving nature of eggs, sugar, butter, and flour when combined.

My fascination with gravestone recipes was ignited during a Library Science class in 2019, coinciding with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the guidance of social media expert Dr. Jen Golbeck, I ventured into the world of algorithms and social network platforms. For this course, we were tasked with creating a niche social media account. At the time, my options were limited due to the pandemic,
leaving me to explore my newfound interest in cooking.

Simultaneously, I was interning in the digital archives of Congressional Cemetery in Washington D.C. as part of my program requirements. Dr. Golbeck suggested that I align my social media account with my cemetery work, leading me into the realm of #gravetok and #cemetrytiktok. Little did I know that this decision would set me on a path to uncover the intriguing world of gravestone recipes.

Three months into my daily TikTok postings, I expanded my search beyond Naomi’s grave. Atlas Obscura, Find a Grave, and cemetery blogs became my go-to sources for researching gravestone stories. My first encounter with a gravestone recipe outside Naomi’s was the captivating engraving on Kay Andrews’ gravestone, which had made headlines in Logan, Utah. Maxine Menster’s Christmas cookie recipe and a no-bake cookie recipe from Nome, Alaska followed suit. Constance Galberd’s date and nut bread recipe, adorned with the inscription “100% good stuff and 0% bad stuff,” was uncovered through a blog search.

My culinary exploration led me to an array of fascinating recipes, totaling 28 from the United States and Israel. The oldest recipe, Maxine’s Christmas cookie gravestone, is 30 years old. Strikingly, the vast majority of gravestones belong to women. Desserts dominate the repertoire, ranging from cookies to cakes to pies.

The two gravestones in Israel are the only two international ones I am aware of and both are written in Hebrew. One is a baked date and nut roll belonging to the grave of a woman named Ida Kleinman, and another is a yeast bread that belongs to the grave of a Kibbutz chef named Yankale Tofor. I was lucky enough to work at the American Jewish University, where one of the librarians read and spoke Hebrew, and was able to translate the gravestones for me. Ida’s recipe was fairly straightforward, including detailed instructions. There were also several blog posts that also offered translations for her recipe. Yankale’s had an extra layer in that his gravestone only had the ingredients but no the instructions written on his grave. Apparently his wife was quoted as saying, “If you know how to cook, you’ll know what to do with it.” Jackie, the librarian who worked the translation, sent me additional recipes in order to compare instructions of similar dishes to recreate his famous bread. Once translated, each recipe required additional trials and errors to recreate. Ida’s baked dish included Turkish delight, an ingredient that was wonderfully interesting to include in baking. Yankale’s required a lot of experimenting with yeast to get the right consistency before I started seeing results.

Many have questioned whether gravestone recipes constitute a trend. In my interactions with the families connected to these unique memorials, none seemed aware of the existence of other recipe gravestones. Rather than following a trend, these personalized gravestones reflect a broader shift towards remembering individuals in more intimate and unique ways. In Congressional Cemetery, modern graves often feature references to hobbies, life accomplishments, beloved pets, and even book call numbers from the Library of Congress.

By the summer of 2022, I began receiving messages from descendants of the women commemorated on gravestone recipes. Grandchildren and great-grandchildren shared memories and anecdotes, revealing the enduring impact of these recipes on family traditions. It was during this period that I boarded a plane bound for New York, ready to meet Naomi Odessa Miller-Dawson’s family in Brooklyn.

At Green-Wood Cemetery’s iron gates, I met Naomi’s son, Richard Dawson, and her granddaughter, Nailah. As we drove to Naomi’s spritz cookie recipe grave, Richard shared that it had been his idea to immortalize her recipe on her headstone, a decision that felt fitting for a woman who cherished cooking. Naomi had been a private person, the daughter of immigrants from Barbados, and her love for cooking was central to her family’s life. They recalled how she insisted on homemade meals, believing her culinary skills surpassed those of any restaurant.

Our visit to Naomi’s grave was followed by a journey into her recipe. One of the intriguing challenges of gravestone recipes is their lack of detailed instructions. Naomi’s grave offered only a list of ingredients. In her kitchen, we gathered the necessary tools and ingredients, including Naomi’s original aluminum cookie press, which Richard still cherished. As we began measuring ingredients, Nailah imparted her grandmother’s wisdom: butter should be solid when mixing.

The recipes serve as guiding lights, but the true magic lies in the techniques and memories of the baker.

At every step, Nailah shared anecdotes and insights into Naomi’s approach to making spritz cookies. Richard watched, reminiscing about his childhood days spent observing his mother in the kitchen. We even enlisted the help of Nailah’s son via FaceTime, the family’s resident baker, who insisted on chilling the dough before using the cookie press. It became evident that the subtleties of a recipe, often unspoken, hold the key to its authenticity.

When the cookies emerged from the oven, the kitchen was filled with the irresistible aroma of buttery delights. Richard’s comment, “That smells right,” was followed by a moment of shared anticipation as we each picked up a cookie, clinked them together, and took a bite. “That tastes right too,” he added.

In that moment, the true beauty of gravestone recipes became apparent. Each time a loved one revisits the recipe, they are enveloped in more than just memories; they engage their senses in a multi-dimensional connection with the departed. The familiar scents, the tactile experience, and the taste of the dish evoke cherished moments and keep loved ones close. In a simple recipe engraved on stone, we find a profound testament to the enduring power of food and the enduring bonds it creates with the living left behind.
2024 Endowment Updates from AJL!

by Jerry Krautman, Development Consultant, and Jackie Ben-Efraim, Development VP

AJL has sought to create an endowment program to support our programming for many years. We have recently accomplished that goal and will be able to provide financial support to one conference attendee with the revenue from the general endowment fund seeded with funds from AJL’s low interest savings account.

You may ask — what is an endowment? Simply put, it is a savings account. The AJL Endowment Fund is a permanent fund. It benefits current and future generations equally. We will not touch the body of the fund. We will only disperse 4 or 5% of the interest accrued annually. For example, if the body of the fund is $100,000 and we disperse 5% annually, we can use $5,000 for AJL programming.

As the AJL Endowment Fund grows, we will be able to increase our support for our AJL programming.

In addition to those donors who helped create the AJL Endowment Fund, we want to thank the inaugural donors who have made the following programs possible:

Barbara Young Leff Mentorship Fund
This fund consists of the Barbara Young Leff bequest, donations in her memory, and a gift from Cheryl and Steve Leff to support the Barbara Young Leff Mentorship Program.

Manfred Gottschalk Judaica Librarianship Endowment
This fund supports the AJL Judaic Librarianship publication in memory of Manfred Gottschalk.

Shirley Epstein AJL Keynote Address
This fund endows the AJL Annual Keynote Address in honor of Shirley Epstein by Rivka Yerushalmi.

AJL Fiction Award
AJL’s newest award is the Fiction Award endowed by Dan Wyman. Hopefully, in the near future, we will establish endowment funds for the awards and prizes given by AJL. These awards are now gaining wider recognition beyond our organization so we need to ensure that we have the money to recognize praiseworthy books well into the future.

To learn how you can support our AJL Endowment Fund, Barbara Young Leff Mentorship Fund, Manfred Gottschalk Judaica Librarianship Endowment, Shirley Epstein AJL Keynote Address, or create a new named endowment, please get in touch with Jackie Ben-Efraim at ajlmanager@gmail.com.

Thank you for helping to make AJL the leading authority in Judaic Librarianship.

Chapter Chatter and Member News

AJL-Canada

In this Canadian Authors’ Showcase on Sunday May 5, 1 p.m. EDT, twelve Canadian authors of children’s, YA and adult books will introduce their most recent or upcoming (2024) titles, providing an overview of the newest Canadian literature, both fiction and non-fiction, by Canadian Jewish writers. Publisher Margie Wolfe of Second Story Press (Toronto) will follow, speaking about her 35 years of publishing in Canada. We will end with a Q&A. All AJL members are invited to attend this celebratory event via zoom.

Anne Dublin, Membership Chair, AJL-Canada

New York Metropolitan Area

Across Four Years: NYMA Reunion and Maimonides Exhibit Tour

After a four-year hiatus, the first in-person meeting of AJL’s New York Metropolitan Area (NYMA) chapter took place Wednesday, Feb. 21, 2024, at the Yeshiva University Museum (YUM), located at the Center for Jewish History in Manhattan. Welcoming new faces, as well as veteran members, outgoing NYMA Chair Rina Krautwirth, along with incoming NYMA Chair Emily Apterbach (both research librarians at Stern College’s Hedi Steinberg Library), discussed future activities to reunite — and reignite — the large and diverse group of Judaica librarians in New York City. Hedi Steinberg’s Head Librarian Edith Lubetski — founder and first president of NYMA — spoke via Zoom on NYMA’s years of noteworthy achievements. NYMA Board Members Ina Cohen and Noreen Wachs discussed past events, including school workshops. Past presidents Shulamith Berger, Marlene Schuffman, and Tina Weiss were also in attendance.

The group was then given a guided tour of YUM’s exhibit “The Golden Path: Maimonides across Eight Centuries featuring Highlights from the Hartman Family Collection of Manuscripts and Rare Books.” The exhibit, showcasing the vast legacy of the famed physician, philosopher, and Torah luminary Moses Maimonides (also known as Rambam), featured an overview of the rare and beautifully illuminated manuscripts and early printing press editions on loan from famed repositories in Europe, Israel, and the U.S. Among these manuscripts — some in Rambam’s own handwriting — were his classic Guide to the Perplexed and Yad Hazakab (Mishneh Torah), and letters to fellow scholars on medicine or Jewish life in the Muslim world. Other highlights included a carved 11th century door to a Torah ark from the Ben Ezra Synagogue (of Cairo Geniza fame), and — continuing his

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legacy into the modern age — of Rambam by Ben Shan and Arthur Szyk. The exhibit even included a cell phone cover with the medieval sage’s face and a baseball shirt from the venerable Maimonides School in Brookline, Massachusetts. NYMA is grateful to the YU Museum for providing this wonderful opportunity to tour the exhibit.

Hallie Cantor,
Acquisitions Associate, Yeshiva University, NY

LIAJL

LIAJL hibernated for the winter months as always. This spring we look forward to some fun programming.

Thanks to our program chair Arlene Ratzabi who led the BOOK CAFE at our joint meeting with her synagogue featuring the title, The Heaven on Earth Grocery Store by James McBride. We look forward to our next program at her synagogue featuring Steve Zeitlin, author of JEWels - Teasing out poetry in Jewish Humor and Storytelling.

From the President

Dear colleagues,

Happy spring! It’s still pretty chilly on the East Coast of the USA, but birds are chirping and the sky is blue, so that’s enough for me. Last month, I attended a symposium co-sponsored by the Institute for Museum and Library Services and the Council on American Jewish Museum entitled “Museums Respond: Strategies for Countering Antisemitism & Hate.” Although the topic was serious, I came out of the event encouraged and inspired. The emphasis of the event was a focus on partnerships and collaborations for teaching and engaging with people to undo stereotypes through heritage institutions such as museums and libraries. I was particularly pleased to see AJL content like the Love Your Neighbor lists and the Sydney Taylor Awards cited as great ways to teach about Jewish joy and authentic Jewish experience.

The work you do in AJL and in your libraries by sharing and teaching through books and stories has a tremendous impact. Keep strong and read on!

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

Michelle

Great Books, Tours & Zoom Programs


- Our guided tours of metropolitan New York City: include Walking, Bus and Boat Tours around New York Harbor. Some of our most popular tours visit the Lower East Side, Jewish Harlem, Jewish Philadelphia, Ellis Island, Chassidic and Hipster Williamsburg, the Grand Concourse in the Bronx, Borough Park and the Sephardi community in Flatbush.

- Some of our 45 exciting Zoom programs include:
  - The Wandering Jews of New York City, Synagogues of the United States, Jewish Philadelphia, Jewish Canada, Synagogues of Western Europe, Art of the NYC Subways, Welcome Back to Brooklyn, the Works of Moshe Safdie and the Works of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Oscar Israelowitz can be reached at his website:
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families looking for a new take on celebrating the Passover seder will be delighted by this Haggadah that “highlights the various Jewish heroes in history and the values they exhibit as they relate to the Passover story.” Suitable for anyone in grade school and above, the text is authored by two prominent rabbis who interpret the traditional Passover Haggadah in a modern way - adding other noteworthy individuals throughout history (other than solely Biblical personages), who have contributed to the liberation of the Jewish people. For instance, prior to candle lighting, the text includes “A Word of Welcome” for the participants to read aloud: “Heroes are not born as heroes. Everyone has the potential to become a hero. When an opportunity to make a difference presents itself and one acts. That is when an everyday person can become a hero. When a person stands up for others, he can become a hero...”

The order and Hebrew prayers retain the traditional structure of a typical Haggadah, with interesting additions of short tales of heroic acts by a variety of people, both known and obscure. For instance, after dipping the karpas (parsley), we learn about Simcha Blass, a kibbutznik from the early 20th century who developed the system of drip irrigation, changing the lives of populations living in arid conditions around the world. Another example of appropriate “hero” placement is set prior to the asking of the four questions, where a quote from Kesha Ram Hinsdale, a state representative in Vermont, is included, saying, “This idea that you could question everything feels particularly based in my Jewish faith.”

The illustrations by co-author Deborah Boden Cohen are lovely watercolors that complement the text beautifully. Hebrew, English, and transliterations are included on all pages. Tempting international recipes for Seder meals are included at the back, in addition to the index of 46 heroes, which includes names such as Helen Suzman, Naomi Shemer, Michael Twitty, Yigael Yadin, Ruth Messinger, Debbie Friedman, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and Leonard Bernstein. For those who may question any of the choices, the introduction also states “We have to remember that heroes are imperfect. Yet we can still honor their achievements even, in some cases, they didn’t live a fully exemplary life.” This new Haggadah is highly recommended for families who are looking to enliven the traditional seder and for libraries that collect different Haggadah versions.

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

Bible Stories and Midrash


In this modern Midrash from master storyteller Jane Yolen, we learn that disagreements in Eden began with the fruit. Apple, pomegranate, fig, grape, and citron argue about who is the sweetest, yummiest, hardiest, etc. Finally, God says, “Enough!” and puts two caretakers in charge of monitoring the battle. With instructions to only eat vegetables, which must be dug up from the ground, and no fruit, which is freely hanging from trees, the Man and Woman begin their job. They do not like working hard to get vegetables and are soon overwhelmed by the voices of the fruit yelling, “Eat me! I am the sweetest!” “No, eat me! I am the biggest!” Encouraged by the snake, “Listen to the Fruits!” The two people begin to taste the various fruits in the Garden. Angered, God sends them all out of the Garden where they must work hard to grow the food they eat.

Intense, dark, yet colorful illustrations bring the Garden of Eden to life. The fruits are depicted with wonderfully representative personalities. Lush trees, delicious looking food, and a slimy snake round out the artwork supporting the story. The text starts with the creation of the world, brings in arguing fruits, adds Adam and Eve as caretakers who fail in their task, confusingly culminates in the expulsion of all living things from Eden (“God took them all...out of the garden and put them on the blinking light God called Earth.”) while weaving in subtle mentions of the snake. The message here is that while we have learned to work hard, we caretakers of the earth, like the fruit, argue. We are sweet and difficult. We have good taste and bad. But “some of us make all of us
REVIEWS OF TITLES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

a little bit better.”

The story does not flow well and, despite being a midrash, will leave a lot of questions for anyone familiar with the creation story. This is not the best of Jane Yolen, and could have used more thoughtful editing; however, because it is Jane Yolen, a Sydney Taylor Body-of-Work Award winner, some libraries may want to add it to their collections.

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

Biography


Each spread of this collective book biography introduces a notable Jewish woman (or, in one case, a mother-daughter pair). For each figure, four lines of rhyming text are followed by an informational paragraph; callouts add “fun facts to mensch’n” and discussion questions that encourage readers to connect the subjects of this collective biography to their own lives (on Hadassah founder Henrietta Szold’s spread, “How can you help others?”; on intersectional activist April N. Baskin’s, “How can you make sure that no one feels left out?”). The pastel-hued illustrations are simple but well-balanced with these elements. The book highlights girls ranging from scientists to political figures to actors. Representation of racially diverse girls and of disability is a plus, though overt acknowledgment of queer identities would have enhanced this title’s overall message that Jewish girls can do and be anything. The information included about each woman is brief, but will hopefully inspire young readers to learn more about the “mensches” who most interest them. Back matter includes a timeline, a list of “18 Honorable Menschen,” and discussion of the term mensch. A useful title, ideally in conjunction with other biographies that go into greater depth, for classrooms and for collections serving early elementary readers.

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


In another installment in Meltzer’s series, featuring Eliopoulos’ bobbleheaded caricatures and cartoon layout, Ginsburg is portrayed wearing black judicial robes, with heels, along with her distinctive lace collars (end papers have illustrations of Ginsburg’s many famous collars). Even when shown playing as a child, she’s in her robes, heels, and large frame glasses.

Meltzer uses a first-person narrative, including actual quotes from interviews and biographies. As it traces through Ginsburg’s entire life there are portraits, with name labels, implying they are the girls that inspired Ginsburg or shared in her values. Unfortunately, they are not mentioned in the text and there is no further clarifying information provided in the book. Included are a “Timeline,” “Sources,” and “Further reading for kids.” With the smaller page dimensions, it does not contain as much information nor is as engaging as *I Dissent* by Debbie Levy, or *No Truth Without Ruth* by Kathleen Kruhl.

The “Ordinary People Change the World” series has 39 books and is designed as an early reader option for children not ready to read the “Who was...?” book series. This title is recommended for libraries with early reader biography collections.

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

Board Books


Sarah Aroeste is a writer and singer who has been an advocate for Sephardic culture and for Ladino, its Judeo-Spanish language. In this board book, Aroeste traces a child’s first impressions of the world, while featuring Ladino words. At each of three stages of development,
the parents declare “Mazal Bueno” to encourage the baby. The simple but effective illustrations should connect with parents. There is also a QR code connecting with a video of the author singing “Avram Avinu,” a Ladino song.

The board book should be in synagogue and preschool libraries.

Fred Isaac, 
Oakland, CA


This delightful board book for the very youngest children can get them moving as they emulate the life cycle of a tree. “I am a seed / So tiny and small. I sleep in the earth / Until the rains fall.” Each colorful illustration of nature also portrays three joyful children performing the action as written. (“Now I am a tree/Stretching up to the sky.”) This board book would make a nice addition to those who collect books for Tu b’Shvat or board books in general.

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

Fiction - Early Readers


This early chapter book retells the story of Reb Yitzchak Zilber when he was a young boy growing up in Communist Russia in 1930. During this time, it was forbidden for Jews to publicly gather to pray, read the Torah, or observe the holidays. Young Yitzchak understood that though the Jews were terrified of getting
caught by the government, they yearned to demonstrate their love for G-d through their practice of rites and rituals. Yitzchak shows his first act of bravery by stepping up to the bima and reading the Torah portion for the minyan when he realizes that everyone else is too frightened to do it. Back at home, his loving mother is baking the traditional Yom Tov food, so dear to Yitzchak’s heart, but now where will he and his gentle father find a sukkah to eat in on the first night of Sukkos? The government spies know his father is a rabbi so they cannot build a sukkah at their house. They walk all night, quietly knocking on the doors of Jewish friends who they hope have a sukkah they can use. Sadly, they find that nobody has one; the father regrets he didn’t build one himself, despite the danger. They stop to pray and then the father suddenly remembers Misha, a man he met in the summer, who hinted to him that from his porch he can see the stars. His father realizes this was his way of conveying without so many words, that he found a safe way to hide a sukkah. Sure enough, when they find Misha’s apartment, he welcomes them into his sukkah!

Yahri’s beautiful illustrations do an excellent job of conveying the fear of the members of the minyan, Yitzchak’s mother’s warmth, and the kindness of his father. While the text is full of references to the great danger that the Jews had to live with during this time, there are no scary illustrations of the government officials. Included is a very helpful author’s note to explain the historical backstory. A glossary to translate all of the Hebrew and Yiddish vocabulary is in the back. This title is most appropriate for day school and synagogue libraries.

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

Fiction - Middle Grade


A tale of four generations of Sephardic Jewish girls spanning from 1492 to the modern day, *Across So Many Seas* by Ruth Behar is a true diasporic story, showing the immigration of the Sephardic population from Spain to Turkey to Cuba and finally to Miami where a large Sephardic population has settled.

The tales of Benvenida, Reina, Alegra, and Paloma, told over a five hundred year period, exhibit the trials and tribulations that the Sephardic Jewish community encountered in the quest to find a place that accepted them. The Spanish culture resounds throughout the generations, with Ladino music playing a major role in the lives of all four characters, with the oud, a Middle Eastern short-neck lute-type musical instrument, playing a major role in the stories.

Each of these girls is forced to confront their collective past as they try to find their place in the wider Sephardic diaspora. Objects that are passed down such as the oud, and a Magen David necklace show the intergenerational tales of these girls. The symbolism of the key is also important, a symbol that the girls will always return to their homes. The girls understand that they are part of a historical chain.

The tales of these girls came full circle when Paloma and her family took a trip to Spain in 2003. They go to their cultural homeland and are confronted with some of the memories of their ancestors and the sacrifices that they made to keep Jewish tradition alive.

Based on some of the tales that the author heard about her family, this book is truly a unique representation of the Sephardic Jewish experience. Written for a young adult audience, this book is recommended for school, public, and synagogue libraries.

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


Max Bretzfeld, age 11, boards a Kindertransport train in Berlin, under protest. He does not want to leave his parents, who he is certain need him as much as he needs them. But they insist, and enroute to London, Max is joined by Stein, a tiny dybbuk, and Berg, an equally small kobold (a German hobgoblin). They sit on his shoulders and offer a Greek chorus of commentary, advice, opinion and comic relief that only Max can hear.

That is not the most interesting thing about Max.

Readers learn that Max is a genius, with technology, and even more impressive, with an uncanny ability to understand people, especially bullies and blowhards, and knows just how to handle them. He never lets himself be the victim.

Another interesting aspect to Max’s story is that he lives with the Montagu family, Jewish, wealthy, titled, influential, and based on reality (research Operation Mincemeat to learn more about Max’s new “uncles,” Ivor, an enigma, and Ewen, active in British intelligence. Other characters from the operation show up as well, as does Baron Victor Rothschild). Before long, Max, who wants
desperately to return to his parents, has convinced Uncle Ewen to train him as a spy.

The first book of a duology, Max is a tour de force of brilliant storytelling, character building, and sly humor, as well as supplying several aspects of World War II and Holocaust history. Max's training includes building his physical and mental stamina, learning to play poker, and outsmarting a kangaroo named Kathy. His brain is constantly working, trying to figure out every facet of the challenges that confront him. It ends on a cliffhanger, and readers will be counting the days till they can be with Max again.

This book is recommended for all libraries that collect middle grade fiction.

Carla Kozak, Retired children's librarian, San Francisco, CA


Yakov, a young boy with kippah, payot, and tzitzit, is not interested in working in his father's grocery store. He wants only to study and explore the stars. He is in charge of his three rambunctious little sisters and one day, with them at the neighborhood park, he sees a dark-eyed girl with beautiful toes (he's not used to seeing bare or sandaled feet). She wears a headscarf, and while her three energetic little brothers run and play, she reads a book—about Space. Yakov and Aicha bond over their shared interest and become the best of friends, exploring at the library (where there is a sign for silence, and a sour-faced librarian), sharing their favorite foods, and caring little that the neighbors look askance at their friendship. But when they get too close, and Aicha's veil symbolically slips off, their strict fathers declare they're not to see each other anymore, build a wall between the houses, and then Aicha's family moves away. Yakov feels lost in the universe.

Years later, Yakov, minus payot, kippah, and tzitzit, and Aicha, without her hijab, meet at an astronomy conference, and they never part again.

There's a lot going on in this graphic novel, set in Montreal and originally written in French, both emotionally and artistically. The Orthodox neighborhood amidst the diverse metropolitan city is richly portrayed, as is the world of Yakov's dreams and desires. While his father, and also Aicha's, are always shown as large, overpowering, and yelling, Yakov notes that his mother is sweet and gentle, and wants him to be happy. Readers see that Yakov and Aicha, as adults, pursue their love of astronomy, and then their love of each other, but don't know if or how they are connected to their religions and cultures. Science and love triumph, and indeed, that can and does happen. For children who long for larger worlds, and for those growing up in mixed families, The Stars can offer validation.

It should be noted that some illustrations show children playing violently, hitting each other and, in two instances, getting "pantsed" (underwear is shown in one, a bare tuchus in the other).

This title is recommended for libraries with diverse clientele and equally diverse collections.

Carla Kozak, Retired children's librarian, San Francisco, CA


A middle grade novel starring music prodigy 12-year-old Rosie who is on strike from playing the violin and wants to make new friends and find hobbies. Instead of spending the summer at music camp, her mother takes her to her mother’s childhood home to visit her grandparents. Grandma Florence’s dementia and health are getting worse, and Rosie has never spent much time with her grandmother. In an old garden shed on the property, through a magical experience, Rosie meets her mother, Shanna, as her 12-year-old self.

This is a coming-of-age story that explores intergenerational trauma, not only the Holocaust survivor intergenerational trauma, from both Shanna and Rosie’s perspectives, but also the family’s shame and attempts to hide genetic neurodivergencies. Rosie has synesthesia, a condition which causes sensory crossovers, such as tasting colors or feeling sounds. Rosie discovers her great-grandmother was also a musician before the Holocaust, but never played again afterwards. Through Rosie’s synesthesia and talks with her 12-year-old mother she is able to help the girls in the family to begin healing.

The accurate portrayals of Rosie’s manifestations of synesthesia seem more ‘magical’ than her visits with her younger mother, which allows the reader to not be distracted by their interactions. Isler herself has synesthesia, but with different manifestations than Rosie’s. Where Rosie is a violin prodigy, Isler was a child star performing in musicals. Isler also pulls from her family’s experiences in the Holocaust and their practices of Judaism, but also makes it clear that this is not an autobiographical novel. This title is recommended for libraries with middle grade collections.

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

Continued on page 15

Old via letters, emails, and video chats between fellow campers Sam Cohen and Tripti Kapoor, *The Secret of the Dragon Gems* is an exciting and heartwarming fantasy story involving extraterrestrial life and very human emotional conflicts. After a comet streaks across the sky on their last night of summer camp, Sam and Tripti find each other at the stream, where they’ve come to escape the misery they’d felt all summer long because they don’t fit in with the other campers, and bond over their shared love for the *Dragon Gems* book series. Though they only became friends at the very end of their camp stay, their friendship continues when Tripti chooses to write to Sam for her summer letter-writing homework, and they discover that the two rocks they’d taken from the stream that day are no ordinary rocks. The rocks, now named Jasper and Opal for the two kids’ favorite Dragon Gem dragons, move on their own, get hot and cold without relation to their surroundings, and leave cryptic markings on papers in the kids’ rooms. Meanwhile, Sanford P. Dilloway, III, the owner of Camp Dilloway, is trying to track down which campers took the stones, and his attempts to get them from Sam and Tripti escalate from friendly to suspicious. While Tripti and Sam try to figure out what’s going on, Tripti is also dealing with her best friend’s sudden new coldness toward her, and Sam is dealing with the effects of the only friend who shared his excitement for geology moving away and leaving him alone. With some help from Sam’s Bubbe and Tripti’s younger siblings, the two new friends meet up on the winter solstice to return Jasper and Opal to the comet which had deposited them at Camp Dilloway earlier that summer.

LaRocca and Baron are both award-winning authors, and this book follows in the high standards they’ve set via excellent world-building, fully developed and believable characters, engaging pacing, and an awareness of the contemporary child’s world that makes the story come to life. Middle grade readers will love the social media parallels (a Discord server, T-mail and T-chat, Wonkipedia, and Funky Things) and many will see themselves in the friendship struggles each character faces. Sam and Tripti’s respective cultural backgrounds are strong presences as the two exchange stories about their holiday experiences and foods, along with one recipe from each child that the reader can see as well: rugelach from Sam’s Bubbe Ruth and masala chai Snickerdoodles from Tripti. Themes from Judaism and Hinduism are explored, including forgiveness and ideas about bringing light into a place of darkness. Without being heavy-handed, the book displays values of intellectual curiosity and cultural diversity. This title is a must-have for children’s collections.

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

Matas, Carol. *Zevi Takes the Spotlight*. Victoria, Orca, 2024. 118 pp. $10.95 (9781459838826) PBK. Gr. 3-5. Reviewed from an ARC.

Prolific Canadian author Carol Matas has another winner with this fun middle-grade novel that seamlessly blends elements of mystery, Jewishness, friendship, and the extraordinary. The tale revolves around Zevi, a young boy with a peculiar gift—psychic powers that allow him to foresee certain events. Zevi lives in Vancouver, a common filming location, and excitement fills the air when famous Jewish actor Robert Lemon arrives to film a movie. Zevi’s family home is selected as a location for some scenes. Zevi and his friends (also with Hebrew-sounding names) are hoping to get parts as extras, but soon a series of mysterious accidents plague the film set. The tension builds as a spotlight explodes, a crew member trips the actor, and a potentially life-threatening incident involving a mango allergy unnerves everyone. Zevi, armed with his psychic abilities, takes it upon himself to uncover the truth behind these strange occurrences. He and his friends and family attempt to solve the mystery, revealing hidden motives and unexpected culprits.

This book is tagged by the publisher as an “Ultra-Readable Page Turner,” and this is true due to the liberal use of simple dialogue and vocabulary that will be easy for reluctant readers to access. The plot is entertaining, the portrayals of family and friendships are positive and the inclusion of Jewish practices and values are few, but important, especially at the conclusion of the book, set at the family Shabbat dinner table.

The climax is satisfying as Zevi’s detective work not only saves the film production but also forges an unexpected bond with the grateful movie star. The famed Robert Lemon, appreciative of Zevi’s courage and intuition, becomes a mentor, paving the way for Zevi’s own dreams of becoming an actor in the future.

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

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*Reviews of Titles for Children and Teens* continues on page 16.

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Spring 2024

*A Little House on the Prairie* meets *All-of-a-Kind Family* in this middle grade novel. Shoshi leaves Ukraine with mother and sisters, headed for “Nordokta” where her father and brother have been homesteading in order to escape conscription and pogroms back home. Shoshi quickly falls in love with the prairie landscape and adjusts to the homestead life, but experiences tension at school where she faces both acceptance and antisemitism. Shoshi wonders whether acting more like her Christian neighbors would make life easier, which brings her into conflict with beloved older sister Libke, who is stalwart in keeping Jewish traditions.

The period detail in this book feels accurate and interesting: you really get a picture of Shoshi’s world as she passes through it, from the shtetl to an American train station to a prairie schoolhouse. The family’s Jewish life is recognizable to modern readers. One small quibble is that they light Hanukkah candles on a Friday night, followed by the Shabbat candles — and then Papa pulls out his violin, which would not be done in an Orthodox household.

It must have been very difficult to keep things strictly in that time and place, but this did pop out as a conflict. The debate between Shoshi and Libke about how best to handle their differentness feels evergreen: Jewish kids are still grappling with the exact same issue today, whether to assimilate further in the hope of acceptance, or embrace their Jewishness as a source of strength and pride.

*A Sky Full of Song* is clearly meant to serve as a Jewish-oriented parallel to *Prairie Lotus* or the original “Little House” series. It is a family story with a focus on sisters, and shows life on the frontier with more of its diversity than Laura Ingalls Wilder generally did. As a result of this deliberate effort, some things feel a bit contrived for effect. The encounter with Native American kids in the town store acknowledges the devastating effects of the settler movement on the Indigenous populations they displaced, but Shoshi’s musings on the matter feel rather modern.

In addition, one cannot help wondering more about how Jewish families like Shoshi’s would have survived in isolation on the prairie in the long run. The Jewish farming community in North Dakota was a fascinating chapter in US Jewish history, but it did ultimately fizzle within a couple of generations. It would have been nice to see more of the greater Jewish frontier community represented in the story, as well as more information about it in the author’s note.

Overall, this is an engaging story set in a unique place and time that holds up well in conversation with other books that tackle similar themes and settings. *A Sky Full of Song* is a welcome addition to school, public, and synagogue library collections.

Aviva Rosenberg,
Youth Services Librarian, Ridgefield Free Public Library
Ridgefield, NJ


Erica S. Perl wrote this novel adaptation of R. J. Palacio’s award-winning graphic novel, *White Bird*; the film version is scheduled for release in October 2024. The story centers on Julian, the bully first introduced in the graphic novel, *Wonder* (Penguin Random House, 2012), and his interaction with his grandmother, Sara, who lives in Paris. Julian, who regrets his previous behavior, has started a new school and interviews his grandmother about her life for an assignment. To distinguish between Julian’s conversations with his grandmother and Sara’s recounting of her life, their conversations are written in the third person with italicized text. Grandmother’s story is narrated in the first person. Sara grew up in a loving Jewish family in a southern French village in the 1930s. When the Nazis invade the Free Zone, Sara is hidden by a schoolmate, Julien, and his family in a deserted barn. Sara and Julien form a deep friendship and she is devastated when he is murdered by the Nazis. Surviving the war in hiding, Sara is reunited with her father. As with the other *Wonder* books, the theme of kindness permeates throughout the story as do the themes of courage, survival, and love. This novelization will be welcomed by children who may not enjoy reading graphic novels.

The book is illustrated with Palacio’s drawings and eight pages of color photographs from the film. Extensive back matter includes an afterword by Ruth Franklin, an author’s note from both Palacio and Perl, a note about the book’s dedication, an illustrated glossary, a bibliography, and a discussion guide. This book is highly recommended for public, school, and synagogue libraries.

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


It’s been a year since the terrific trio of Naomi Teitelbaum, Eitan Snyder, and Rebecca Reznik found themselves desperately trying to control golems and vanquish other supernatural creatures in *Naomi Teitelbaum Ends the World*. Now it’s just the ordinary tribulations of being 13, although Becca, who is trying hard to embrace spiritual maturity, has more than her share of troubles; her father lost his job, her parents...
are arguing, Hanukkah will be scaled back, and Becca’s younger brother Jake, always obnoxious, has turned cruel. Becca’s need for orderly calm is disturbed, and her skin, which itches in response to upheaval, is increasingly sensitive, as it was whenever she was near last year’s demons.

Yes: They’re back...first a mazzik, then a Bar Shiriaka Panda, and most frightening of all, the dybbuk that’s taken over Jake. Who has sent and who is controlling these creatures, and how will the three vanquish them? Eitan dives back into researching ancient Jewish mystics and monsters, Naomi offers analytical opinions, general support, and safe harbor in her home, and Becca is again using her unique brain to do what is most challenging to her: figuring out the nuances of each creature, and their rules of existence.

In the most frightening and ultimately moving of the encounters, the dybbuk is inhabiting Jake’s body, and the three friends revisit and consult with wise, ghostly Rabbi Gershon, who consults his books and summons a spirit minyan for an exorcism. On the eighth night of Hanukkah, the overarching spirit, Ashmedai, reveals himself in Becca’s garage, and the trio uses everything they’ve learned together in a battle of wits to regain control of their lives.

It’s great to be back with Becca, Naomi, and Eitan, and their world in which Judaism is normative, as are Naomi’s two moms. The word autism is never stated; it’s just accepted that Becca is on the spectrum. Her family, and her friends and their families allow her to be herself. The deep, supportive friendship of the three is the essence of these books.

It seems as if they’ve tamed their supernatural monsters and can move ahead to the trials of high school life, but if there’s a third book in the future, focusing on Eitan, it would be welcome. Especially if their literal interpretation of Jewish lore has them creating more rhyed couplets and hitting another demon with shallots and a stuffed toy pony.

This book is recommended for all public and most school libraries.

Carla Kozak, Retired children’s librarian, San Francisco, CA


Family stories are a continuing source of interest for pre-teens and teenage readers. Rochel Tovli provides us with an interesting set of interlocking problems. The Shain family is a large and loving family in the Orthodox world. Fourteen-year-old Esther is the oldest girl (her older brothers are away at Yeshiva), and a wonderful help to their mother. At school, however, she feels alone; she does not have a true best friend among her peers. Eight-year-old Miriam is truly compassionate and loving, but has trouble in school; she is dyslexic and bullied by classmates. Their mother, while touched by their difficulties, is pregnant (and gives birth to her 11th child); she is thus unable to put lots of effort into their lives. In the end, though, the girls (with help from their mother and others) find answers to their dilemmas. Esther may finally have the friend she craves, and Miriam becomes the tutor for her tormentors, who have fallen behind in school.

This book is both touching in its portrayal of family life and growing-up problems and a bit disconcerting. The girls (especially Esther) are given major responsibilities of family leadership. Their father is almost completely absent from the plot. And there is very little sense of location — are they in New York? London? Israel? each place has a different vibe. What’s the Difference? should be considered by day school and synagogue libraries.

Fred Isaac, Oakland, CA

Fiction - Teen


Hannah Levin is a typical New York teen. She loves New York City in the winter, especially Chanukah with her friends, and skating in Central Park. However, this year she is forced to go to visit her grandmother in a small town in Texas for Chanukah. However, there is a silver lining — Noah, a teenage boy who is determined to make sure that Hannah has a wonderful experience. Noah is the grandson of the owner of the only Jewish deli in town, Blums and Sons Deli. Noah’s grandfather is elderly and relies on Noah for his help. When a massive snowstorm cripples most of the country preventing Hannah from leaving Texas, Noah works very hard to give her a Chanukah she will never forget, with all the Texas charm. Over the course of the week Hannah begins to appreciate Texas, including the animals (she is allergic to horses), and especially her tour guide, Noah.

This teenage romcom, with a Jewish element, is recommended for school and public libraries.

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

In the fall of 1939 in Czernowitz, Romania, formerly of the Austro-Hungarian empire, young teen Frederieke Teitler witnesses a changing world. Her older sister, Astra, grows more interested in Dr. Marcel Goldmann than in her or in dance. Their father abandoned them and their mother barely holds it together. They move in with Opa, their grandfather, Mama's father. At first, the Soviets occupy the city and establish new rules and regulations. But then the Nazis push out the Soviets and a new kind of terror emerges. The family is forced to move into a ghetto. Rieke witnesses the loss of friends and neighbors while she contracts tuberculosis. She's also lost her sister who has now married Marcel and cares more about him than her family. Through his job at the Jewish hospital, Marcel keeps secrets. A shocking twist leads to an epic battle scene with a bit of an unexpected ending and a setup for the next book in the series. Astra and Colin, and both children eventually learn to communicate and listen to others rather than making assumptions and keeping secrets. A shocking twist leads to an epic battle scene with a bittersweet ending and a setup for the next book in the series.

Author Arnold crafts a fictionalized account of her grandmother's experiences in a war-torn city that undergoes cataclysmic changes while Rieke undergoes her own. Of particular note are the complex relationships between Rieke and her sister and between Rieke and Opa. The title of the book is an apt descriptor of Rieke's maturation, her tuberculosis, and the terror that surrounds her. Rieke is an endearing and sympathetic character who must develop her own coping mechanisms to deal with the constant change and sexual abuse by an older man in order to get food for the family. The ending happens far too quickly and the author's note refuses to divulge the ultimate fates of Rieke's family members.

*The Blood Years*, organized in five chronological parts, is a novel of both loss and triumph with a well-woven narrative that witnesses the realities of war and Holocaust.

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


The first book in this series, Ravenfall, drew primarily from Celtic Irish mythology for its supernatural villains and heroes. This second volume draws primarily from Jewish mythology including the *bamsa, mazzikin* and *sheidim*, Ashmedai, and the Tree of Life. Anna began exploring her magic power and its connection to her family home in the first volume, and she now ventures away from home on an adventure into the Otherworld to save the Tree of Life from Ashmedai, the king of demons. Along with her on the adventure are her father, recently returned from one of his many expeditions to recover magical artifacts, this time bringing home the Seal of Solomon which controls Ashmedai; Colin, the boy whom Anna had befriended after his parents were murdered and he discovered he is a Raven whose duty it is to guard the Shield between worlds; Max, Anna's magical Jabberwocky who usually looks like a cat; and Salem, a friend of Anna's father and a Raven who can help Colin train. Colin continues to battle the dual forces within him, now that he knows the Irish King of the Dead is his ancestor and he has inherited his life magic, used for evil purposes, along with Raven powers designed to protect humanity and the world from forces like the King of the Dead. Journeying through the Otherworld means encountering all kinds of fascinating creatures from mythology and folklore, including the beautiful and terrifying Tzavua and an obsequious Brownie. Anna's misgivings about Salem leads to an argument between Anna and Colin, and both children eventually learn to communicate and listen to others rather than making assumptions and keeping secrets. A shocking twist leads to an epic battle scene with a bittersweet ending and a setup for the next book in the series.

Like the first book in the series, the Jewishness of *Hollowthorn* is unsatisfying, despite this volume's explicit use of Jewish mythology. Anna expresses an uneasiness with her Jewish identity at the beginning and end of the book, but that theme is left unexplored beyond those two mentions. The story begins on the first night of Hanukkah and ends on the last night, but other than being a useful marker of time, the holiday does not play a role in the story. Jewish identity and experience feel more like afterthoughts than crucial parts of the story, as the Jewish details provide neither plot development nor real background texture.

Apart from this drawback, *Hollowthorn* is a well-written and exciting book. Mythological and legendary creatures and objects, from Jewish as well as other cultural traditions, are defined and explained by Anna's book-loving father, who often includes references to the fact that many cultures share mythologies and...
interpret them in different ways. Questions of the effects on an individual of terrible actions even for good reasons, including effects on the person doing those terrible actions, are satisfyingly depicted. Hollowborn is a welcome addition to culturally-inspired fantasy collections, especially as part of a series exploring various mythological traditions. Recommended for public libraries and public school libraries.

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


In this coming-of-age novel set in 1979, Joseph Nissan, a thirteen-year-old Mizrahi boy, is about to experience a very difficult year. He lives with his parents, Jewish-Iranian immigrants, in the rural town of Hazel, Texas. Joseph is having his Bar Mitzvah this year, but he questions why his parents live so far from the city. They are secretive about why they left Iran before Joseph was born and why they live in a remote town. As a Mizrahi teenager, he must maneuver between two different cultural worlds. At home he is called Youssef, his family speaks Persian, eats Persian food, and follows observant Jewish practices. He honors his parents’ observance of Shabbat but wants to also fit into the non-Jewish community around him.

Life becomes more complicated when the Iranian hostage crisis begins, and Joseph and his parents must deal with increased prejudice and threats of violence. As Iranians, the Nissan family is singled out as enemies by some of the townspeople. At school, Joseph is the target of threats and violence, and his parents are the victims of repeated vandalism at home. It seems that being Jewish and Iranian makes Joseph and his family more visible targets.

While the novel is important for showcasing diverse Jewish experiences, some factual discrepancies should be mentioned. The author describes Joseph’s Bar Mitzvah as being celebrated on a Friday afternoon during which Joseph puts on tefillin, reads from the Torah, followed by his reading of the Haftarah. While tefillin is put on during daily morning services, it is not a general practice to wear them on Friday afternoons. Moreover, both the Torah and the Haftarah are not read on a Friday afternoon.

Khubiar captures the complexities of being the only Persian Jewish family in 1970s small-town America. Her portrait of Joseph’s challenges provides readers with glimpses of what it is like to stand out in a small community and be faced with bullying and prejudice. Overall, Khubiar’s compelling novel for young adults is a good contribution to Mizrahi Jewish young adult literature and would be appropriate for Jewish libraries.

Mimi Leyton, 
Greenberg Families Library 
Ottawa, ON Canada


In 1973, Melanie Adler is a Midwestern Jewish 8th grader who deeply yearns, but fails, to be seen and included by the coolest school clique, The Shimmers. The Shimmers live on the “right” side of town in beautiful houses that sit on Shimmer Pond. Meanwhile, life in the Adler home has Melanie, her older brother, and their father walking on eggshells ever since the family survived a horrible car accident. Mrs. Adler is so traumatized and overprotective that the family has to be on guard all the time so as not to trigger her and avoid her scary outbursts and deep depression. Her overbearing and confusing behavior is a secret burden that weighs heavily on the whole family and severely impacts Melanie’s life. To add to Melanie’s sadness, her oldest and best friend, Vicky, is starting to pull away from her as she starts to be noticed and accepted by the Shimmers, leaving Melanie feeling left out. The Shoshanis, visiting from Israel for the year, move to the Adler’s neighborhood and into their lives. Dorit Shoshani and Melanie become fast friends even as Dorit tries to make Melanie understand how silly it is to want to belong to a group that does not even notice her. Through a cooking class, Melanie has the opportunity to befriend one of the Shimmers and finally finds a way to be part of the group. The reader will realize before Melanie does that Dorit’s friendship is real and her Shimmer “friends” are obnoxious and have a negative influence on her. Furthermore, Dorit intuitively understands family trauma since her father has PTSD stemming from injuries sustained during Israel’s 1967 War. Now that Melanie is on the inside, she sees the way the Shimmers behave is wrong, although she still wants to be part of the group. When their meanness becomes personal, Melanie needs to summon up her courage, stand up to this clique and find her best self. While some authors fail to use cultural references in their period novels effectively, Lakritz does an excellent (and fun!) job weaving in 1970s popular culture, adding a rich layer to the story. She also effectively uses some Hebrew vocabulary that enriches her storylines.

This is a well-written and thoughtful coming-of-age novel suitable for public libraries, synagogue libraries, and school libraries.

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

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There are dozens of Holocaust novels for teens. This one adds an interesting twist—a golem story of protection. We first meet Sophie Siegel as a girl waiting to be praised for her academic achievement. Instead, she is pulled from school with the other Jewish students. Her friend, 8-year-old Giddy, is also removed. When the Jews are attacked, Sophie’s parents hide her as the Nazis invade their home. Protected in a closer, Sophie becomes a Golem, with the mission to protect Giddy. The novel then follows Giddy and Sophie through the horrors of the Shoah: to a ghetto, where other community members die; to an unnamed death camp (Auschwitz or Treblinka), where Sophie watches Dr. Mengele at work; into the forest, where Giddy learns to lock-pick as part of a Partisan gang; and finally to Berlin under Allied bombing. There Giddy and Sophie are separated, and Sophie kills Hitler as the Third Reich falls. The conclusion, years later, finds Sophie in New York. She finally finds Giddy, safe and carrying on her name.

*The Vanishing* brings up several emotions. On one level, it is a powerful statement of the power of memory, as Sophie protects Giddy as his *shomeret* and saves his life several times. But the story includes a long list of graphic scenes, including several murders, torture, and starvation. Also, unlike in Jane Yolen’s *The Devil’s Arithmetic*, it is unclear how Sophie becomes a Golem. The story relies on unexplained references, a puzzling timeline, and a series of unlikely connections. In the end, there are too many plot holes here. The book might be purchased by comprehensive Holocaust Centers but is not recommended otherwise.

**Folktales**


Naamah’s wife is never referred to by name in the *Torah*, but according to the *midrash* and Rashi, her name was Naamah. This picture book expands on the *midrash* and imagines Naamah to be a “math and engineering whiz,” instrumental in helping Noah complete his responsibilities. From early childhood, Naamah uses math to creatively solve problems. When God tells Noah to build the ark, he informs Naamah, “I know I can count on you.” Naamah uses her talents to organize the feeding and housing of the animals, and once the flood begins, organizes sports contests for the animals. In appreciation, Noah names the ark the Naamah, while Naamah uses a prism to create a rainbow.

There is much to admire in this book. It’s wonderful to see a strong female protagonist, especially in a Bible story, and particularly one who excels in math. The illustrations, which are cartoon-like, are humorous and engaging. Naamah is depicted as being dark complected, while Noah is a fair skinned redhead. However, the emphasis on Naamah’s use of mathematical concepts detracts from both the humor and drama in the story. While the story seems geared to younger children, the math concepts are way beyond their level, and never really explained. Children may also be confused because a familiar story has been modified. The end page explains the concept of *midrash*; that it, “fills in the missing pieces to imagine the rest,” however much of what is imagined here would never have happened, as children will inevitably point out. The title is listed in the copyright information as being a “*midrash* on Noah’s ark,” but on the front cover as, “a tale on Noah’s ark.” This is incorrect grammatically and means the concept of *midrash* is only presented after the story concludes. Despite these reservations, the book is recommended for school and synagogue libraries.

**History**


his informational picture book explores the remarkable travels of the Sarajevo Haggadah. The chronology covers Jewish experience in Europe from the 14th century era of relative religious freedom, continuing through the devastation of the Inquisition and genocide of the Holocaust up to the current time. The focus of this book emphasizes not the Jewish but the universal significance of this artwork.

We learn the illuminated incunabulum bears evidence of actual use with a child’s Hebrew writing practice and wine stains, deliberately preserved to honor the book’s history. First, a wedding gift in Spain, next secreted away from the Inquisition, then moved through Italy, it was later purchased from an impoverished Jewish family by the National Museum in Sarajevo. It was rescued from the Nazis during World War II by the museum director, who was...
Catholic, and an imam. In later regional wars it was protected by a broad range of citizens, including a Muslim professor. Remarkably, during the war it was presented briefly to the Bosnian Jewish community by the Bosnian president at a Seder additionally attended by Gentile religious leaders before being hidden in an underground vault in the National Bank.

This title is recommended for Jewish libraries and public libraries in communities with Jewish populations.

Suzanne Grossman,  
Children’s Book Committee,  
Bank Street College  
West Orange, New Jersey

Holocaust & WWII


Elisa Boxer’s newest book portrays how hope and renewal can grow from the sadness and horrors of the Holocaust. Boxer is a Sydney Taylor Honor award winner for her 2023 picture book, Hidden Hope: How a Toy and a Hero Saved Lives (Abrams, 2023). This moving and true story depicts how Irma Lauscher, a courageous teacher, brought hope and comfort to children in Terezin, a Czechoslovakian prison camp. She secretly arranged to have a sapling smuggled into the ghetto inside a prisoner’s boot to give the children a living lesson on Tu B’Shevat — the new year of trees. When the tiny tree was replanted in the ground, the children decided to give it some of their daily water rations. By the time World War II ended and the camp was liberated, the tree had grown five feet. Irma then took seeds from the tree and ensured they were planted all over the world and its 600 sapling descendants continue to flourish nearly 80 years later. In 2021, the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City planted one of those descendants, a 15-foot maple tree, a living artifact grown and nourished by children during the Holocaust.

The author approaches the subject matter sensitively by using age-appropriate language, making the book more understandable for a younger audience. Boxer limits each page to a few sentences and choses words such as “taller,” “stronger,” and “longer” to emphasize hope, resilience and survival of the Jewish people. The illustrations complement and enhance the narrative and avoid graphic details. This allows young readers to absorb the illustrations and text without being overwhelmed. Rozentsveig’s illustrations are inspired by actual depictions of Terezin by artists imprisoned in the ghetto. She successfully captures amazement and hope on three children’s faces, particularly when they first see the small sapling. These same three children are featured throughout the book and are easily identified by their clothing. The back matter includes an Author’s Note and Selected Sources which provide supplementary information about the teacher, the children, the sapling, as well as articles on the tree’s descendants.

Overall, this is a wonderful collaboration between the author and the illustrator and is an essential addition to both public and Jewish libraries.

Mimi Leyton,  
Greenberg Families Library,  
Ottawa, ON Canada


A concise history appropriate for middle school collections, the focus is mostly on Auschwitz but includes the rise of Hitler and the Nazis, the implementation of restrictions and the mass deportations and killings of Jews at other camps as well. Chapters are arranged chronologically with insets, historical photos and images, and “How you see history” questions for the reader at the end. Auschwitz and the Holocaust includes a timeline, sources, index, and suggestions for further reading.

There is nothing outstanding about this title that other books in a collection might not include. The writing is clear and the section headings, insets, and images break up an intense text and will hold a student’s attention. It is most suitable for libraries in need of additional materials on the topic, especially for readers who are intimidated by larger volumes.

Judy Ehrenstein,  
Children’s Librarian  
Co-editor, Children’s & Teen book reviews,  
AJL News and Reviews  
Silver Spring, MD


A beautifully illustrated graphic memoir of a childhood lost to war and its aftermath, this is also a tale of survival and unexpected kindness. Enia Feld was a carefree child in the spring of 1939, living with her parents, older sister, and brothers on a farm. She was too young to attend school; something she did

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not do until she was thirteen. With the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939, her life was upended and family members began to disappear from her life, leaving her in hiding with just her older brothers. Ever the singer, she had to contain her songs in her head. Even her brothers left her for a time as well, but the three were reunited, went to a German DP camp, then to the US. The reunion was not to remain, as the brothers needed to work and Enia was eventually placed with an adoptive family. Now Estelle, she went on to live a full and loving life full of song, passing away in November 2023.

Savos’ full color illustrations capture the lightness of life in happy times and the darkness of the years of war and deprivation. Characters’ emotions and the seriousness of situations are clearly depicted, with scenes of violence drawn with honesty and sensitivity.

_The Girl Who Sang_ is a must purchase for all public, school, and synagogue libraries.

**Judy Ehrenstein,**
_Children’s Librarian_
_Co-editor, Children’s & Teen book reviews, AJL News and Reviews_
_Silver Spring, MD_


Based on his own mother’s recollections of her early years in Vienna, the author creates a simple, yet poignant Holocaust story for a young audience, although an adult reader should be prepared to lay the groundwork and answer questions that will definitely arise. Luckily, the eponymous Rosa and her family did escape to America after the family’s store was closed by the Nazis and after her father ingeniously dismantled floor boards to secretly build trunks to sell to escaping neighbors, including a rabbi who hid a _Torah_ under the false floor of one wooden trunk. Heartbreaking is the reality that Rosa’s family had a visa allowing for only three people to depart. Her grandmother stayed behind, her everlasting love being the thing that Rosa carried with her to the new land. Lovely realistic artwork is a perfect match for this story that focuses on a tragic Jewish experience but in no way should be limited to Jewish readers or institutions.

This sensitively depicted slice of history should find a place on the shelves of public libraries and schools, where it can serve as an excellent resource for middle grade students studying immigration or the Holocaust.

**Gloria Koster,**
_Retired School Librarian, New Canaan, CT Public Schools_
_Member of the Children’s Book Committee of Bank Street College of Education_

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**Israel**


This very silly rhyming story follows the adventures of a runaway matzah ball. _Savta_ (Grandma) puts soup in her grandson’s bowl, and the lively matzah ball jumps out, dashes out the door, and begins a wild escapade, traveling throughout Israel visiting towns, historical sites, museums, and events.

The colorful illustrations reflect the excitement and discovery of the animated journey of the matzah ball while providing the readers with a fun journey throughout Israel from mountains to deserts to seas. The characters, although unnamed except for _Savta_, are lively and quite expressive.

A glossary of Yiddish and Hebrew words used throughout the story is found at the end of the story along with a list of sites visited by the matzah ball including a short identification and the location of each one. Similar to the adventures of “The Gingerbread Man,” young children will enjoy a wild ride through Israel while visiting various sites including the Western Wall, Masada, and the Dead Sea, as well as some unusual venues and neighborhoods. This book encourages travel, exploration, and learning about one’s heritage. Recommended for synagogue and day school libraries, and for public and public school libraries that collect diverse children’s books.

**Rachel Glasser,**
_Retired Librarian_  
_Yavneh Academy, Paramus, NJ_  

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**Lifecycle & Jewish Values**


Using a liltin, rhyming text, this charming picture book delivers the message that “Every creation that’s under the sun/Has something important to teach everyone.” Benny and Tzvi go for a hike in the woods with their Bubby. Spotting fish in the river, they learn to always keep their eyes open for mitzvos. The tall trees instruct them to be sure of themselves when performing a mitzvah. A leaping deer directs them to run to do good deeds. When a child runs toward the river chasing a ball, Benny uses all these lessons to prevent an accident.

Brightly colored, cartoon-like illustrations reinforce the lessons being taught. The pages of this book are laminated to last longer in little hands.

All the characters are dressed appropriately for an Orthodox community, and while the tzitziti, yarmulkes, and modest dress may be foreign to less traditional communities, the story and artwork do an excellent job of conveying the important point: pay attention, lessons abound.

*A Walk in the Woods* is recommended for all Jewish libraries, especially those in traditional communities.

**Kathy Bloomfield, **
*A* *JL Immediate Past President*, *Seal Beach, CA*


A lighthearted, rhyming animal tale about irresponsibility prods a reader to question how this picture book is Jewish. The answer is in the source of the moral: care for what you can count on, only that which we all share in common! The connection is not in the text, but on the flap and in the end note, items rarely read by the targeted young audience. This is a Jewish book because its contents are inspired by a Talmud story, *Bava Kama* 50b to be exact.

The animal characters are appealing and well-drawn. A hedgehog decides to build a new home in the middle of the road. Digging out his den leaves piles of dirt hampering passage for everyone else. The selfish hedgehog feels no guilt; he cares only for himself.

He acts carelessly with great abandon until it rains, his home collapses, he almost drowns and, now, in trouble, he needs the help of others he has inconvenienced, especially his neighbors rabbit and mouse. They rescue him, and take him to their home to warm him up despite being put out by his actions that ignore anyone else’s needs. The hedgehog sees the error in his ways, builds a new house out of the right-of-way, and takes good care of the path shared by all. The moral of caring for your neighborhood can be expanded to caring for our shared planet. The actual Talmudic passage includes a dark prediction that the home you think is yours may not always be. This foreboding comes true here, but it does not arrive as future foretold, just rain. The lesson arrives with fun, peppy rhymes, adorable illustrations and strong personalities.

The volume is recommended for religious school libraries for its timely topic, its quality presentation, and its cheery introduction to Talmud stories.

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


Young children share their favorite activities with readers, tying each to a mitzvah honoring Hashem: a boy who loves to sing, sings to make lonely people smile; a girl who loves to dance, dances with a kallab to increase her happiness; a boy who loves to draw makes get well cards for the sick; a girl who loves to run makes sure she runs to her mother as soon as she’s called; a boy who loves to bake, bakes a cake to honor Shabbos. Children who love to play include others who need a friend. All of them share what they love as mitzvot. These mitzvot are their special gifts to Hashem.

All of the characters present as white, one boy has a slightly darker skin tone. The girls’ dresses all have long sleeves and cover their knees. The boys all wear kippot and tzitzit. The one older gentleman wears black with a white shirt. The cartoon-style digital art is appealing. The book is printed on plastic-coated paper, easy to keep clean and dry.

While this book provides a window into an Orthodox community the mitzvot highlighted are worthwhile activities for all children. Recommended for synagogue and Jewish day school collections.

**Suzanne Grossman,**
*Children’s Book Committee*, *Bank Street College* *West Orange, New Jersey*

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The classic story of Rus (Ruth,) a widow, who chooses to stay with her aged mother-in-law, Naomi, is a favorite of Jewish generations. It can have special resonance for children because it embodies the middot (attributes) of loyalty, kindness, fear of G-d, and modesty — all qualities we want to imbue in the young. Author Genendel Krohn tackles the text in a traditional manner. She tells the story clearly according to the mesorah (tradition) that Rus converted to Judaism prior to her marriage to Naomi’s son, Machlon. After Machlon’s death, Rus could return to her non-Jewish family and their ways. Instead, she opts to return to the land of Israel with Naomi, caring for her during difficult times. Soon, Rus marries Boaz, a member of the Sanhedrin. She gives birth to a baby boy named Oved who grows up and has a son named Yishai. Yishai has a son named Dovid who became the great Dovid HaMelech (King David). Many believe that Moshiach (the Messiah) will be descended from King David.

The megillat (tale) of Ruth is read each year on Shavouot because just as Ruth accepted the Torah upon herself, the Jewish people accepted the Torah upon themselves on Shavout. Ruth told Naomi, “Wherever you go, I will go. Your Hashem (G-d), is my Hashem. I will never leave you.” Like Ruth, the Jewish people also affirm their devotion to G-d. Krohn’s telling of the story is from a traditional point of view and includes supporting sources. Her version is child-friendly with clear language and appealing illustrations by Tova Katz. Krohn is the prolific author of many books for young people under the Feldheim imprint. Recommended for synagogue and Jewish day school collections.

Rena Citrin, Retired Day School Librarian, Current Member of the AJL Fiction Award Committee Chicago, IL


Where is Poppy? is a gentle book about working through grief. A young Jewish child enters Passover with her extended, multi-ethnic family but feels anxious that everything will be different without her grandfather Poppy, who has died since the last seder. Long-standing family traditions, such as using a chili pepper to make spicy matzah ball soup, are all the same, yet everything feels wrong. The child takes her family literally when they tell her that Poppy is still with them, and she searches for him throughout the house. Though Poppy is nowhere to be found, seeing her family keeping their heritage alive helps her realize how traditions have the power to bring and keep families together and how special moments help us discover that our loved ones remain cemented in our lives, even when they are gone.

This book is softly illustrated with pencil drawings, gouache, and charcoal, and finished digitally. The people and focal points are mostly drawn in neutrals, with pastel paint used to add colors to the backdrop and picture details. The backmatter is especially lovely, as Prichard writes about her own grandfather, the original “Poppy.” It includes a clear and comprehensive glossary of Passover traditions, offering both accessibility and elucidation to all readers, including those who are unfamiliar with the holiday.

The Passover seder is often an intergenerational event, full of kid-friendly, rituals such as opening the door to Elijah and spirited rendition of the song “Dayenu.” Young children can read about these rituals in this book and understand why the main character feels her loss most deeply at this time of year, while appreciating that keeping her grandfather’s traditions alongside her family helps him remain close. Although grief can be a more mature topic, the story and illustrations are firmly set from a child’s point of view, and this book is recommended for any school, synagogue, or public library collection that serves children from kindergarten through second grade.

Laurie Adler, Hewlett-Woodmere Public Library Woodmere, NY

Picture Books


Sophie has a big imagination which helped her create a monster to give shape to her fears. Now she has outgrown these fears, thus she has outgrown her monster. He cannot stop crying because no one can see him or hear him. But he wants to be seen and heard. Sophie’s bubbe who helped
create her monster rushes her to get ready to go to religious school at the synagogue. Sadie loves to go because her Bubbe and Zayde are deeply involved there; they love it and these feelings are internalized by the child. To pacify her sobbing monster, Sophie takes him with her to shul. He attends lessons with the teacher in the classroom, prayers and singing with the rabbi in the sanctuary as Bubbe helps lead services from the bima, Israeli dancing in the social hall, story time led by Zayde in the library, and finally a writing assignment using imagination. Sophie shares her emotional growth and writes about her scary monster; he will get to live on. Her imagination takes him out of hiding and into a story for all to read. The characters in this sweet picture book are strong and strongly Jewish. Synagogue and religious school arrive as joyous, pleasant experiences, attracting everyone to join in.

Oddly, this warm look at practicing Jews never uses this word or Jewish or Judaism in the text which proudly sports a Yiddish vocabulary. Clearly it is a story directed to the initiated. Congregants are happily active in religious and social activities at their shul which lovingly embraces old people, young people and their imaginary monsters. The volume is recommended for religious school libraries for its superb PR about synagogue membership.

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


Join a young boy named Benny in this rhyming tale of his being a mensch in his family, neighborhood and village. When a storm brings extensive damage, Benny rallies the community to all work together to rebuild. Written in the aftermath of the October 7th massacre, it seeks to encourage empathy.

A more in-depth exploration of the actual ways Benny spreads kindness unites the residents and leads the rebuilding would have added value to the story. Digital art portrays mostly light-skinned characters. There is one page showing people in traditional Bedouin dress living in Benny’s village. This title is an optional purchase.

Suzanne Grossman Children’s Book Committee Bank Street College West Orange, NJ


Leah, a young Jewish girl living in Cochín, India, is a storyteller. She loves her community and its religious traditions. When the community moves to the new state of Israel, she misses her home. A new friend, an olive grove, and a magical blue butterfly help her realize, “If those olive trees could make this new land their home, surely I can do the same...but India will remain a part of me forever.”

The story, while specific to a unique community, has a universal message, with which any child who has had to leave a home, school, or community could identify. The information about the Cochín community is presented appealingly, with additional historical background material and a glossary, at the end of the book. What makes this book shine are the illustrations, featuring lush, intensely colored paintings, rich with decoration. The illustrator is herself an Indian Jew, originally from Mumbai. The illustrations will hold children’s interest as they listen to the story, and make this book a pleasure for adults to read aloud. While the community is not labeled as Orthodox, the synagogue, traditions, and dress are consistent with Orthodoxy. This title is highly recommended for homes and all synagogue, school, and public libraries.

Hillary Zana, Retired teacher and school librarian, Los Angeles, CA


On Tuesday, Rachel woke up very sad. Her mother would be coming home late, so her grandmother would be waiting for her when she got home from school. At school, she didn’t feel like playing, her art class was terrible, and her friends did not wait for her to walk home with them. Back home, things went from bad to worse as she could not find her new package of stickers, nor did making cookies with Bubby make her happy.

The following Tuesday was completely different. Rachel woke up in a great mood. Bubby would be there later! School was great. Art class was fun. When she got home, she told Bubby about the difference in her weeks. Her Bubby explained that sometimes “It all depends on which glasses you decide to wear. When we wear the black glasses, everything looks difficult and annoying. But when
we wear the pink glasses with their rose-colored lenses, everything looks easy, beautiful, and simple.” Rachel and Bubby spend the afternoon making black and pink glasses, then play at seeing how the world changes when they alter what they see.

The illustrations in this book are realistic, with pages on the sad day tinted with gray, and pages on the happy day colored brightly. They support the somewhat wordy text very well.

This book is part of the “My Toolbox: A series of books for the development of emotion regulation in early childhood” – “books of hope, tools to cope.” Each book in the series comes with a “tool,” in this case a magnetic pair of pink glasses. There is also a guide for parents in the back of the book with information about ways to promote emotion regulation in young children. In addition, exercises to change one’s mood are provided, along with a mood chart.

An excellent learning tool for families with young children, and a good addition to libraries looking for books to help their clients with the emotional lives of children.

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

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Similar to a noodlehead tale, this funny story with playful cartoon illustrations introduces us to a silly main character. When builders arrive to construct his home, he repeatedly asks them to add another room. When his mansion has 100 rooms, he then foolishly fills each one with one type of object — a room with just tables, a room with just beds, a room with only curtains, a room with nothing but forks and so on. Needless to say, he has to constantly rush about gathering the things he needs just to have a meal or to settle down for sleep. It’s only when he identifies a few essentials and brings them together in the 100th room — the only space he hasn’t filled — that he can relax, recognizing that a simple life is more valuable than one filled with too many possessions. Not explicitly a Jewish story, this tale does reflect Jewish values. A note in the back references the wisdom of the ancient Jews who understood that too many possessions make for needless worries.

In the end the man sells all but one of his rooms, and unburdened, he enjoys nature and the company of other people.

Excellent for discussions about ethics and values, this book will make a delightful addition to both Jewish and secular classrooms and libraries.

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

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Siva, Micah, and Joshua Siva. 1, 2, 3, Nosh With Me. Illustrated by Sviatoslav Franko. Oakland, The Collective Book Studio, 2023. 32 pp. $15.95 (9781685577270) HC. Preschool-Gr. 2. ARC

Buckwheat, a helpful black and white Sheepadoodle, takes you through the year of traditional Ashkenazi Jewish foods in this delicious counting book for young readers. From 1 golden challah through 10 crispy latkes, the large illustrations done in warm watercolors offer the opportunity to spark conversations about the times the foods might be eaten and family memories connected with them. While there is no obvious rhyme nor explanations of the holidays, children in Jewish settings will appreciate the images of many familiar foods. Amy Wilson Sanger’s *Let Nosh!* (Knopf, 2002) board book has a more lyrical text but the pages are much smaller and lacks the math aspect this book offers.

A challah recipe is included along with suggestions for toppings. Micah Siva is a trained chef and author of the recent Jewish cookbook *Nosh* (The Collective Book Studio, 2024).

**Judy Ehrenstein,**  
*Children’s Librarian  Co-editor, Children’s & Teen book reviews, AJL News and Reviews Silver Spring, MD*

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When this picture book begins, Benjy’s room is too messy for tonight’s bidikat chameitz, a pre-Passover tradition of searching for breadcrumbs explained accessibly in the text; the Hebrew term is identified in the author’s note. Younger sister Shira is looking for someone to play with her, so Benjy — though he feels he doesn’t have time since his room needs cleaning — invents a game of searching for paper balls around the room to help Shira practice for tonight. While young readers learn about bidikat chameitz from this activity, they also have the chance to pick up on the way the game is helping to solve Benjy’s original problem.

The book provides a useful starting point for thinking about how to approach a problem that seems overwhelming, an aspect also addressed in the author’s note. A mix of full-bleed illustrations and vignettes provides variety.

**Shabbat & Holidays**

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Benji’s Messy Room is recommended for classrooms and collections serving primary readers and their families.

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


Mother and Father Rabbit take their son on a walk and point out different points of interest such as a tree, mountains, a sheep and flowers along the way. As Louis sees each object, he exclaims, “Challah!” for indeed, each of these does look like a loaf of challah! In a playful twist, at the end of this book digitally illustrated with colorful pastels, when Louis sees an actual challah, he proclaims “Shabbat!” This delightful book would make a good baby gift.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


Kalaniot Books has reissued this beloved, brightly illustrated Haggadah with a contemporary feel, which was originally published in 2000 by Simon and Schuster. It is a favorite of many families due to its warm and welcoming style, while retaining all the aspects of a traditional Haggadah. It appears that although both the text and art are basically the same as the original published title, there is the modern addition mentioning Covid after the recitation of the 10 plagues: “Today, bad things also ‘plague’ the world: water and air pollution, animals facing extinction, AIDS, cancer and other diseases.” This Haggadah includes Hebrew, English, and transliteration, varied skin tones in the bright and appealing illustrations, and international recipes.

For those who are looking to replace wine-stained books from 24 years ago, this is a long-awaited reissue. For families looking for a good family-friendly Haggadah, this one is an excellent choice.

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


Young readers are invited to help make some hamantaschen in this small touch and feel board book written from the point of view of cookie dough. Similar to Christie Matheson’s Tap the Magic Tree (HarperCollins, 2013) or Herve Tullet’s Press Here (Chronicle, 2019), each double page spread includes interactive elements: pat the dough, plop the filling, fold the edges until some almost good enough to eat hamantaschen are made. A note on the back cover briefly explains Purim and the meaning of these triangular cookies.

A delight for the very young in all types of libraries that serve young children.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


In her recent board book, Joni Sussman introduces preschoolers to the holiday of Purim using Grover and Shalom Sesame friends. Tom Leigh, an experienced illustrator of Sesame Street books, provides entertaining and vibrant pictures of familiar faces, including Avigail, Moishe Oofnik, and Brosh. Toddlers and preschoolers can share in the Purim excitement while the characters bake hamantaschen, dress up in fun costumes and listen to the story of Queen Esther.

The book is appropriate for children from six months to five years old, since the content is simple and engaging. Illustrations are colorful and visually appealing to capture the attention of young children. This book provides a joyful learning experience that is generally found in Sesame Street books. Purim celebrations are accurately portrayed in a fun-filled and age-appropriate manner. The book is engaging and captivating and, therefore, suitable for young children.

Joni Sussman is the Sydney Taylor Body-of-Work Award winner for 2024. She has written four other “Shalom Sesame” board books: Grover’s Hanukkah Party, Shanah Tova, Grover!, A Seder for Grover, and Grover Goes to Israel. With Happy Purim,
Grover!, Sussman has produced another outstanding board book that promotes the celebration of a Jewish holiday. This short and educational overview with simple narration is a welcome addition to both public and Jewish libraries.

Mimi Leyton, Greenberg Families Library Ottawa, ON Canada


Tyrannosaurus is very busy preparing for his Passover seder, and everything is finally ready except for one thing: he has no guests since all the other dinosaurs think he wants to eat them. Each of the others has a problem as well — no parsley or cracked matzahs or too many guests. No one wants to listen to Tyrannosaurus complain about his own troubles until the dinosaurs realize that his issue is the worst. A solution is finally reached when it is decided that all the dinosaurs will put aside their fears and share one big seder at Tyrannosaurus’ house. They conclude that the most important part of Passover is sharing the seder with friends.

The brightly illustrated story includes many types of dinosaurs who are named and pictured, but there is no further information about them. There are few real details about the Passover celebration aside from the seder dinner and a basic author’s note. The Yiddish word tsuris is used in the title and is translated on the title page as “troubles.” The illustrations are fun and engaging, especially the eyes, and noteworthy for their texture and details of each dinosaur. A cute, lively butterfly flies from page to page introducing and highlighting each new dinosaur. This is a light, enjoyable story which should delight young children who love dinosaurs while providing a positive feeling about the seder.

Rachel Glasser, Retired Librarian Yavneh Academy Paramus, NJ


Cousins Noah (in New York City) and Nora (in New Zealand) are in regular competition over who’s home is cooler and which of them is actually upside-down. They decide to put their friendly rivalry to the test with an eight-day competition to see whether Hanukkah is better in the wintry northern hemisphere or the summerly southern one. The cousins embark on a series of outings and experiences that are very different from one another, but also very similar; on the sixth day Noah drinks hot chocolate while Nora eats hot chips, and they both end the night with a sticky jelly donut. In the end, whether they acknowledge it or not, both cousins are the winners.

Among the many, many Hanukkah picture books on the market this one stands out for its unique perspective and original storyline. The back-and-forth between the two countries is pitch perfect, crafted with neat linguistic parallels and clever comparisons. The more you read, the more you catch the small connections between the cousins’ differing experiences. The illustrations are witty and absolutely charming, enhancing the sense of different-but-also-the-same. In one iconic scene, Noah has fallen on his bottom while ice skating and Nora has face-planted in the sand while surfing. The perfect balance of upside-down and rightside-up is visually satisfying as well as thoroughly amusing.

Perhaps a more subtle parallel is the fact that New York has an enormous Jewish community while New Zealand has a very small one; most American readers will be extremely familiar with Noah’s surroundings but very unfamiliar with Nora’s. The lesson that holidays can be fun no matter where they take place is obvious, but readers also come away with a renewed appreciation for cousin relationships and an awareness that meaningful Jewish life takes place around the globe. Hanukkah Upside Down is an absolute must-have for all libraries serving young children.

Aviva Rosenberg, Youth Services Librarian, Ridgefield Free Public Library Ridgefield, NJ


A Purim story that extols themes of courage, strength, and safety, this tale follows the adventures of Micah, a young boy who loves his mighty gragger. It makes him feel strong and brave like Queen Esther, and without it, he feels vulnerable and unsure of himself and fearful of the bullies in his class. On the way home from the family Purim party, the gragger is lost. But this gragger has its own power as it travels from a raccoon’s hands to the silver fish’s mouth to the graceful heron’s beak, which then eventually drops it right back at Micah’s house. Micah shows his class his mighty gragger and as they learn the Purim story, he recognizes the feeling of power and strength once again.

The colorful and lively illustrations portray the excitement and fun of Purim celebrations along with the seriousness of feeling in
control and safe. The repetitive whirr...whirr...whirr of the gragger throughout the story will resonate with young children. A note is included with a brief discussion of Purim and how its themes apply to all children today. Although the term gragger is translated as noisemaker on the first page of the story, its purpose and use is not explained so that some basic knowledge of Purim is needed. Mighty Micah will be a popular Purim story!!

Rachel Glasser, Retired Librarian, Yavneh Academy Paramus, NJ


Enthusiasts of the series featuring Beni and his beloved bear family are in for a delight. The author/illustrator Jane Breskin Zalben created this newest volume during the pandemic and now 25 years after her last publication in the series the bear family is back and has grown to include the next generation. Beni, a bear cub long ago, is now a married father of two, with an extended family including six cub cousins and more on the way. Reflecting modern families there is now a divorced mother in the family. We join in the excitement as the annual cycle of holiday celebrations and family traditions is shared with the newest generation.

The exquisitely detailed mixed media illustrations beg to be gazed at with the distinctive expressions on each bear’s face bringing every character to life. The artwork of the foods accompanied by recipes is mouthwatering, sure to have our youngest readers clamoring to cook them all. Non-dairy substitutions are included where needed in the recipes, making them pareve and great for all meals. The recipes have clear directions and are easy to follow with adult help.

The book includes an index, table of contents, calendar of holidays, a family tree covering five generations and a glossary. Adding to the fun, some Yiddish words included are shvach, kvell, plotz, and kibitzer. This book is a great addition to all children’s libraries, Jewish and secular, providing a welcoming window into Jewish life combined with a focus on strong extended family connections. It’s a valuable addition to all Jewish homes including information about ten holidays with accompanying stories, crafts, activities, songs and recipes. It’s perfect for families to dip into all year long, year after year, likely to become a family heirloom. This treasury is a treasure!

Suzanne Grossman, Children’s Book Committee, Bank Street College West Orange, NJ

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This collection of stories and excerpts from novels aims to “showcase the rich multilingualism of Jewish fiction.” It contains a sampling of eight stories and ten excerpts from novels, each originally written in a different language. Dr. Nora Gold is a prize-winning fiction author, founder, and editor of the online literary journal, *Jewish Fiction*. The stories reflect a wide range of styles and themes, from a diversity of modern and contemporary authors. The book includes a helpful introduction, a listing of copyright credits, and brief biographical sketches of the authors and translators. The stories reflect the Jewish experience in different times, places, and settings. Although they capture the interest of the reader, some excerpts from novels don’t stand on their own, like self-contained stories. The anthology is an interesting, useful addition to Jewish fiction collections in academic, public, and synagogue libraries.

**Susan Freiband, Volunteer Synagogue Librarian, Agudas Achim Congregation, Alexandria, VA**


Middle-aged author Giorgio, who is vacationing in Parma, Italy, spots a stunning young woman on the beach who strongly resembles Sophia Loren and he is captivated by her beauty. She is engrossed in reading “The Yemenite Girl” (actually one of Leviant’s books). Since Giorgio is, in this narrative, the author of the book, he has a good opening to start a conversation with her. To his delight, Sofia is excited to meet him and wants to correspond with him via email. Giorgio, thrilled by her offer, fantasizes about her falling in love with him. In her emails, she laments her unhappy marriage and her present affair with a married man who is unwilling to leave his wife. The book has two beginnings and two endings. One ending fulfills Giorgio’s fantasies while the other leaves them unrealized. It is up to the reader to decide how the book should end.

Once again Leviant tells a story enriched with wit and humor. This short, charming book explores the themes of love, marriage, infatuation, adultery, and hopeless fantasy. Leviant fans will not be disappointed by his latest book.

**Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH**


In the second installment of her Rabbi Vivian series, a worthy heir to the Rabbi Small mysteries by Harry Kemelman, we find the Rabbi poised to step into the position of senior rabbi in her Providence, Rhode Island congregation. However, before taking on this new role, she is confronted with a host of challenges, a synagogue board that is not in lockstep, decisions to make about whether she and her wife should start trying to have a baby, a climate crisis that is quite literally barreling toward the city in the form of a potentially catastrophic hurricane, and a robotics company creating tech that may be being used for less than aboveboard purposes.

All of these story lines may seem like a lot, but Lewis tightly weaves together the various threads while inhabiting the novel with a host of fully developed and sympathetic characters, even the ones that might be harder to like in reality. Lewis understands the complicated nature of synagogue life and what it means to serve a community made up of disparate parts. She also seamlessly, and without preaching, integrates the challenges many synagogues are having in the 21st century around a whole host of topics, including Israel and Palestine. While the mystery (a missing robot) is certainly central to the book and ties in nicely with the messaging around climate change, the heart of this story is the people and Lewis certainly knows how to bring them to life.

This title is suitable for synagogue libraries, public libraries, and book clubs.

**Talya Sokoll, Noble and Greenough School, Dedham, MA**

Continued on page 31

There has been a distinct lack of contemporary adult literature focusing on the rise of white nationalism and the preponderance of traction the far-right has made in mainstream discourse. There are notable novels, particularly from the Jewish perspective, that focus on events like the Charlottesville riots of 2017 or other modern-day Nazi rallies. This all changes with the publication of *The Golem of Brooklyn*. This book is not subtle, in the best way possible. Told from multiple perspectives, including Len, a stoner art teacher, and Miri, a lapsed Chasidic woman working at the local bodega, this book follows the two of them after Len creates a Golem.

There have been countless retellings of the Golem over the generations, from *The X Files to Minecraft*, but in this story, the Golem is not newly created; he is the same Golem, from the first Golem who is asleep until he is needed again. Therefore, this creation story means that he has the memories of everything he’s ever done, everyone he’s ever helped or harmed, and every wrong done to the Jewish people, Lest the story be spoiled, this Golem was awakened at Babyn Yar, so suffice it to say, he still wants revenge, so revenge he shall seek, when at the climax of the book we find Len and Miri on the outskirts of a white supremacist rally, cautiously wondering if the golem is their best option for safety.

This book is brilliantly witty, devastatingly relevant, and contains a seemingly disconnected chapter early on that I hope becomes Mansbach’s next book. Suitable for synagogue libraries, public libraries, and book clubs with the note that there is a lot of violence and profanity.

Talya Sokoll, Noble and Greenough School, Dedham, MA


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 grandfather’s 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 doing 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.

Sally Stiegitz, Editor in Chief, AJL News and Reviews, Stony Brook, NY

Continued on page 32

What if the universe were sending you actual written messages, guiding your romantic relationships with certainty? Would that be a relief or a burden? When Daphne Bell is in fifth grade, she gets a postcard saying simply, “Seth, eight days.” The only Seth she knows, a fellow soccer player one grade ahead of her, becomes Daphne’s first boyfriend and, as predicted, they date for one week and one day. From then on, the messages keep coming, as postcards, sheets of papers, and even as a fortune cookie slip. Each one bears a name and a time period, essentially a clear expiration date for that relationship. Until one day, the note has only a name (Jake) and no date. Jake Green is just about perfect (Jake) and no date. Jake Green is just about perfect and determined to uncover her heritage.

**NON-FICTION**


This is a spirited, enthusiastic study of the weird beings in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament by a Professor of the Hebrew Bible at Union Theological Seminary. She considers seraphim, cherubim, angels, demons, the adversary (the satan), the sea monster (Leviathan), and others, at times drawing upon the mythologies of other Middle Eastern peoples to help understand various monsters. Dr. Hamori insists that theologians have tamed the monsters in the Bible and “the biblical God-character” who makes use of many of these beings. She maintains many authors contributed to the Bible and they had differing views. The tales of monsters, by and large, depict a God who is powerful and wants His power to be recognized, not a rational being with a benevolent attitude toward human beings. The author recognizes that parts of the Bible do portray a God of rationality, love, and mercy but maintains that these do not negate other “monstrous” depictions in the Bible. They are not reconcilable which, to Dr. Hamori, adds to the richness of the Bible. It indicates, in her opinion, that some of the biblical writers recognized “the precarious experience of life in this world” and saw God as the creator of evil (Isaiah 45:7) as well as of goodness.

Although the subject matter is scholarly, the writing style of this title results in a work suited for both academic and public libraries.

Shmuel Ben-Gad, Gelman Library, George Washington University


Katherine Fennelly did not know she was Jewish until her early thirties. Her mysterious maternal grandfather, Francis Kalnay, kept secret his Jewish heritage, name (Klein), and murders of his sister and nephew by the Nazis. Fennelly’s mother Elsie rarely spoke of him because she was perpetually angry at her philandering father who left her, her mother, and her sister destitute in Hungary. A cousin mentioned to Fennelly that the family was Jewish and Fennelly, a social science researcher, was intrigued and determined to uncover her heritage.
Francis Kalney had led an astonishing life. He spoke seven languages fluently and was articulate, intelligent, and charismatic. He came to the United States in 1919 at the age of twenty. During World War II he was recruited by the OSS, the precursor of the CIA, and became director of intelligence operations in Europe for the Allies. During the McCarthy hearings, he fled to Mexico for fear of accusations of being a Communist sympathizer. In Mexico, he reinvented himself as a prominent gourmet cook and a self-taught renowned architect.

Fennely’s meticulous research included interviews with family members and access to formerly top-secret declassified OSS documents. Another interesting insight into Kalney’s diverse talents is that his book, Chucaro Wild Pony of the Pampa, was selected as a Newbery Honor book in 1958. Family photos, an index, and a bibliography are included. Patrons in all libraries will be fascinated by this captivating story of the resilience and achievements of a complex Renaissance man.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


*Ancient Persia and the Book of Esther* is a fascinating exploration of Persia at the time of the biblical book of Esther, written by Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, Welsh professor and chair of ancient history at Cardiff University. Even though Llewellyn-Jones considers the Book of Esther a folktale, there is much that scholars and laymen of any denomination can learn from this well-researched and copiously footnoted book. Llewellyn-Jones presents a picture of the opulent court life, the secluded harem, and the important role of prestigious eunuchs, nobles, courtiers, and slaves of ancient Persia. Those familiar with the Book of Esther will easily find parallels between Llewellyn-Jones’ commentary and the story of Esther and Mordechai.

Each chapter begins with a translation of a chapter of the biblical text and continues with Llewellyn-Jones’ commentary. For example: Haman proposes that the man the king would like to honor should be adorned in the King’s robes and paraded through the streets of Susa on the richly ornamented King’s horse. This form of tribute was the established way the king honored deserving men in his realm. Included in the book are many archaeological drawings of warriors, slaves, kings, and queens in lavish royal garb. Detailed maps of the city and palaces are also included. Most unsettling are the drawings of prisoners being hung on poles as the main form of cruel capital punishment. According to Llewellyn-Jones’ in-depth research, some feasts went on for many days and most of the time the king was drunk; therefore, when he gave the decree to banish Queen Vashti he regretted it the next morning.

Lay readers and scholars alike will have a greater appreciation of the Book of Esther in its historical context after reading Llewellyn-Jones’ well-written book. This title is recommended for academic, synagogue and public libraries with extensive history and religion collections.

Ilka Gordon, Beachwood, OH


*Jewish Blues* discusses the controversy as to what is the true blue of tekhelet and from which mollusk the dye comes. In addition, the book is a compendium of Jewish mysticism, the history of dress, an overview of Jewish history, and snippets of literature. Rabbi Gershon Henekh Leiner, in the nineteenth century, claimed to have found the special mollusk that is called the hillazon. This has real significance because “the rabbis of antiquity mandated that the tekhelet dye be produced from the secretion of a marine mollusk known as the hillazon.” Until today, the controversy continues to rage.

This book elaborates on current disagreements existing among Orthodox rabbis, scientists, and scholars regarding the actual color, production, and correct mollusk Murex to produce the color of antiquity. Baruch Sterman, a scientist and Orthodox Jew, is one of the modern proponents that the Murex mollusk can be dyed to make what he considers an authentic color.

While there is a disagreement about the actual shade of blue, there is a general agreement, however, that blue has significance in Judaism in these ways: Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan sees the color associated with “vision and prophecy;” blue color appears on the tzitzit; and associated with Zionism, blue appears on the Israeli national flag. Note that Yosef Haim in his commentary on the Talmud identifies the town of Luz as a center of tekhelet production, which he associates with protecting the residents of the town.

Another recommended book on tekhelet is *The Rarest Blue* by...
Baruch Sterman with Judy Taubes Sterman. Baruch Sterman, a physicist, gives more of a scientific account of the snail and dyeing process than the Sagiv book. *Jewish Blues* has color illustrations, a glossary, notes, and an index. The book might be particularly of interest to Jewish artists, archivists, and archaeologists.

**Ellen Share,**  
*Washington Hebrew Congregation’s Children's Librarian, Washington, D.C.*

Aran, Gideon. *The Cult of Dismembered Limbs: Jewish Rites of Death at the Scene of Palestinian Suicide Terrorism.* New York: Oxford UP, 2023. 366 pp. $29.95 (9780197689141) PBK.

ZAKA (the Hebrew acronym for Identification of Victims of Disaster) is a voluntary organization of ultra-Orthodox Hasidic Israeli men established in the aftermath of the suicide attacks and bus bombing beginning in the late 1980s, with ZAKA recovering corpses and body parts, identifying the bodies of both victims and the attackers, and reassembling the bodies with attention to religious laws to provide for dignified burials. Gideon Aran, a professor of sociology and anthropology at the Hebrew University, was embedded with ZAKA during and right after the Second Intifada, and he draws on interviews with members and research. Aran presents an ethnographic study of the organization, the first half being a “thick description” of the work of clearing the area in the aftermath of an attack. Aran traces the history of the organization, its structure, the status of members within ultra-Orthodoxy, and its relationship to secular Israeli society. He outlines their justifications for the work as well as the personal and religious compromises they make, under rabbinic guidance. Aran portrays the members as seeing part of their role as purifying the victims of terror attacks, and in their work sacrificing themselves against the sacrificial action of the suicide bomber.

Aran, with an earlier book on Islamic suicide bombers, has a fascination with morbid and violent death. He has a love-hate relationship with ZAKA. The tone of the book is uneven, ranging from overheated descriptions of the experiences of the members to analytic scholarly writing. The book suffers from poor editing and organization, with analysis and stories often repeated. The translation from the original Hebrew is strained. Aran focuses on the period of the Intifada with no update past those years. With these weaknesses, this book is only suited for academic libraries with extensive collections in Middle Eastern and Israel studies.

**Harvey Sukenic,**  
*Hebrew College Library, Newton, MA*

Thakkar, Sonali. *The Reeducation of Race: Jewishness and the Politics of Antiracism in Postcolonial Thought.* Stanford, U of Stanford P, 2024. 271 pp. $90.00 (9781503636446) HC; $30.00 (9781503637337) PBK.

In this book, Dr. Thakkar traces the history of the United Nations and UNESCO’s project of racial reeducation, specifically how this project was framed by the persecution of Jews during the Holocaust. She argues that this project helped create the antiracist campaigns and thought of the period after World War II. Her main goal is to bring this project to light again as she feels that this is very much an understudied element of postwar studies on anticolonialist writers, literature, and culture. This UNESCO project influenced many anticolonialist writers such as Franz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, Edward Said, Caryl Phillips, and others. She writes that she “triangulates these discourses with the prewar history and postwar afterlife of the Jewish question...Indeed there are multiple and sometimes competing Jewish questions at stake in the midcentury reeducation of race, and these require some careful mapping.” She conducts this mapping and discussion of the history of UNESCO’s project to change the understanding of race through very thorough usage of UNESCO’s archive, as well as many works by the writers under discussion.

Dr. Thakkar meticulously documents the connections between the anticolonialist movement and its writers and the question of how Jewishness can be used to examine the Black experience of racism. For example, she quotes Fanon as writing “…it can be said that there is a Jewish people but not a Jewish race.” Further, she states that “…he resituates Jewishness as his example of a people whose existence is neither reducible to nor a response to the imposition of race.” In her coda, she writes that one can trace the impact of this project to the current arguments over the definitions of antisemitism, and that “my point is not that we should produce better definitions of racism and race, but that definitions matter, because once they are issued, they shape our concepts and our critiques.” This book is recommended for academic libraries that are looking to expand their holdings on the topic of postwar history, Jewishness, race, racism, and other similar topics.

**Eli Lieberman,**  
*Assistant Librarian, Hebrew Union College, NY Campus*
Grayson, Mara Lee, and Judith Chriqui Benchimol, editors. *Challenging Antisemitism: Lessons from Literacy Classrooms.* New York, Rowman & Littlefield, 2023. 176 pp. $90.00 (9781475864823) HC; $36.00 (9781475864830) PBK.

Grayson and Benchimol collected lesson plans used in secondary and college classrooms to help fight antisemitism and educate students about the multitude of Jewish voices. In each chapter, an educator discusses a lesson plan or curriculum they successfully used to help educate students about the diverse Jewish history and Jewish culture. Lauri Mattenson’s chapter looks at using Jewish comedians’ rhetoric to educate about Jewish experience while building connections to non-Jews. Maureen Akerib uses *Maus* by Art Spiegelman and Rapper Kendrick Lamar’s album *Damn* in their lesson at a Catholic college that concludes with students creating a soundtrack for *Maus*, choosing songs for each of the six chapters. Benchimol gives resources for English teachers to use about Jewish experiences that are not Holocaust narratives, including a booklist appropriate for middle-grade readers.

Each chapter gives an overview of the reasoning for selecting resources used in the lesson and a discussion on desired learning objectives, before providing the particulars of their lessons. They are not detailed lesson plans but instead, act as inspiration for teachers to create their lessons. Chapters end with “Concluding Thoughts” and “Questions for Study.” The volume contains a bibliography and index. *Challenging Antisemitism* is recommended for libraries that serve educators, including public libraries and academic libraries with education curricula.

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


In this pioneering work, Rowan Dorin pulls back the curtain regarding Jewish dominance of money lending in late medieval Europe. He demonstrates that it was not a solely Jewish occupation, nor were attacks on usury exclusively focused on Jews, but also encompassed “foreign” Christian moneylenders. The latter, who commonly came to be referred to as Lombards, spread out across Western Europe engaging in the same activities as their Jewish counterparts. Like Jews, they faced repeated threats of expulsion from the communities in which they settled. Dorin sets out to “trace the association of usury and expulsion over the course of nearly four centuries.” Through his exhaustive investigation of unpublished archival evidence, he examines attitudes toward money lending and considers the point at which its practice would attract the accusation of usury. Noting that early in the period expulsion was the exception and that “mass expulsion” was to surface “as a characteristic feature of European political practice” later in the Middle Ages, he explores the mechanism through which this change took place. Distinctions between individual expulsion orders are examined but the author’s intent is to highlight how, in some contexts, expulsion became a likely response until the idea became “normalized.” With extensive endnotes and helpful appendices, this volume would be a valuable addition to academic collections supporting studies in medieval European history.

_Randall C. and Anne-Marie Belinfante, Herkimer, NY_


A tempest in a teapot occasionally rears its head in the world of Jewish history, particularly among Israeli religious Zionists. It involves the seemingly obscure question of the Gaon of Vilna’s (18th century) attitude toward the Land of Israel and the possibility that the human effort of settling the land would bring the Messiah. This question has important symbolic weight in religious-Zionist historiography. If, in fact, the Gaon encouraged his students and followers to immigrate to the land of Israel, inspiring them to a life of agriculture and productivity, then the Gaon preempted the _Hovevei Zion_ movement and that of Theodore Herzl (late 19th century) in articulating and putting into practice the basics of Zionism. Perhaps the real roots of Zionism are religious and not secular.

The truth about these issues depends on even more obscure books entitled _Hazon Zion_ (The Vision of Zion) and _Kal haTov_ (The Voice of the Turtledove) attributed to students of the Gaon.

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Much ink has been spilled regarding the question of this attribution. Are these works authored by students of the Gaon? Or were they written by Shlomo Zalman Rivlin, a 20th-century Jerusalemite, who attributed them to the Gaon’s students?

In this important book, an English translation (by Saadya Sternberg) of an earlier Hebrew work, Immanuel Ettinger puts the debate to rest. He meticulously documents the supposed evidence of the earlier authorship and discovers that none of it holds water. The evidence points unequivocally to the fact that these works are simply part of the “Rivilian myth,” anachronistically attributing early Zionism to religious figures. These books never appeared until the 1940s, and there is no other evidence in Gaon’s writings or the writings of his students to suggest that he encouraged immigration to the Land of Israel for that reason or that he believed the things attributed to him in Hazon Zion and Kol ha-Tor. Unfortunately, (as of this writing) the Wikipedia page on Kol ha-Tor continues to attribute it to the disciples of the Gaon. Ettinger’s book alone will not change the ongoing debates, as some continue to insist — evidence to the contrary — on the earlier provenance. This title is recommended for academic libraries with a Judaic collection.

Yoel Finkelman, Ramat Beit Shemesh, Israel


Yair Ettinger’s book provides an excellent glimpse into the rich diversity and ultimately complex tensions that exist within the religious Zionist camp in Israel society. The primary theme running throughout the book’s ten chapters is the “privatization” or democratization of religious authority away from rabbinic leadership towards other groups vying for a voice within the Israeli religious Zionist subculture. The book begins with the example of Naftali Bennett who in many ways exemplifies this trend as a political leader. Bennett is firmly and proudly a religious Zionist, but as a politician maintained an independent, and often oppositional stance vis-à-vis religious Zionist rabbinic leadership.

Much of the book examines in dedicated chapters the most critical fault lines that exist within the religious Zionist community and the tension in the existing rabbinic power structure. Frayed focuses on the issue of female religious leaders, the politicization of their formal titles, and the learning institutions that are training them. This book also tells the story of increased active involvement in prayer services and the proliferation of partnership and egalitarian minyanim in Israel. Insight is provided into the role that the Temple Mount plays within the community and how ever-growing lay activism in this arena has shifted the ground away from the previous conservative consensus exhibited by the religious Zionist rabbinic elite. Ettinger informs of the expanding tension and limited acceptance of gay and lesbian religious Zionist Jews, the explosion of religious Zionist women who have decided to serve in the army, and the Halachic activism of many within the religious Zionist world who want to limit the power of the rabbinate in matters of marriage and kashrut.

Ettinger does an admirable job of depicting the spectrum and diversity of the religious Zionist community from the national Haredi camp on the right to the liberal–Orthodox camp on the left and the diverse mosaic between those points. Anyone interested in understanding the Israeli religious scene would do well to read the book, which belongs in libraries collecting on contemporary Israeli politics and society.

David Tesler, Efrat, Israel

American Jews made great strides during the Gilded Age (1865–1900). This coffee-table sized collection of essays broadens and deepens our understanding of their world. The volume begins with two overviews of Jewish life and contributions during the post-Civil War era period (1865–1900). These are followed by articles on Jewish artists of the era; they include authors, painters, and musicians. The next section provides views into the publishing world, including Isaac Mayer Wise’s American Israelite, Rosa Sonneschein’s American Jews, and Abraham Cahan’s place in the Americanization process. Two essays cover the Jewish role in science and medicine amid antisemitism and exclusion from many parts of society. The final third reviews the Jewish cultural world; it includes a study of the revival of Purim, a profile of Nina Morais Cohen, and analyses of ways the community saw its past and future in America. The final essay is a series of short profiles of major figures of the period; some of them are well-known (Filene, Rosenwald, Szold), and others are less remembered (Ida Friend, David Lubin).

As noted, several essays focus on women’s lives and accomplishments. The book is in large format, with beautiful photographs; some are well-known, others are more obscure. The contributors include well-known scholars from across the intellectual spectrum.
There is no bibliography, but many footnotes and an index. The first impression is of a museum catalog, but it is better used as an in-depth analysis of a period often overlooked. It should be in every academic library; synagogues and high schools with large collections should also consider acquiring it.

Fred Isaac, Oakland, CA

Moshe Zeiri was a carpenter and soldier who created an orphanage for some 700 young Holocaust survivors and refugees. In this engaging biography, photos, documents, and interviews with his daughter, former residents, and colleagues paint endearing portraits of a self-effacing Polish emigrant with a love of theater and Jaffa oranges, and of helpers in his charitable work. At the outbreak of World War II, Zeiri left behind the citrus groves to join the British army; his service in Italy and encounter with the displaced led him to establish in the town of Selvino a “Youth Aliyah” center. There are vivid descriptions of a converted “House of Mussolini” filled with spartan but close-knit quarters, vibrant student activities, and interactions, some contentious, with international aid committees. Within a simulated kibbutz environment, Zeiri and staff nurtured their young charges, taught them Hebrew and secular subjects, and prepared them for emigration to Palestine (many of whom were shipped off and ended up in British detention camps). The author describes what in his view are two types of orphans: the survivors, who were “reborn” following the destruction of families and homes, and idealists like Zeiri and his circle who were alienated from the establishment of the Jewish State as a greater revenge against the Germans after the Holocaust. Largely a secret until the 1980s, their story became public. Drawing on interviews, as well as formerly hidden diaries, letters, and writings, the author analyzes their motivations and asks: why did their missions eventually fail? And who thwarted them? An overview of vengeance as defined in the Bible and the halachic obligation (the word even appeared on gas chamber walls) is followed by backgrounds (with photos) of the members, most of whom had belonged to leftist groups like Hashomer Hatzair or received military training in the ghettos or forests. Loyalty bordered on cultish, due in part to Kovner’s charismatic leadership and shared trauma — i.e., brutality, loss of family, inability to lead or resume normal lives because “this calamity had no precedent.” After their first meeting in Lublin, in 1944, their network, based in Paris, spread over postwar Europe. Their initial plan to kill as many Germans as possible gave way to “plan B,” poisoning the loaves of bread inside a Nuremberg prison for SS officers. The operation is described in detail, down to the disguised group befriending the bakers. In the end, inmates were sickened, but not killed. The group was denied support from Ben-Gurion and the Haganah, who viewed the establishment of the Jewish State as a greater revenge against the Nazis. Indeed, as the author writes, “Every Israeli achievement is an act against those who considered Jews subhumans." The Nokhim members themselves eventually played a part in the Palmaḥ and Mossad, as well as Bricha, the smuggling of refugees into Mandate Palestine.

This book is well-researched, with a chronology of events, and original Hebrew footnotes (translation might have been helpful).

AJL News and Reviews

Spring 2024
Each chapter ends with a poem or elegy exhorting vengeance. Truly, the message, Jews would no longer be victims, resonates today. This title is recommended for academic libraries with Zionism or Holocaust collections.

Hallie Cantor,  
Yeshiva University, New York, NY


This sophisticated and accessible study reconstructs the histories of the genocides the Nazi regime committed against Jews and Roma and the concomitant period (lasting until today) of grappling with the memory and legacy of these events. It does so by foregrounding the voices that have considered the two groups’ parallel tragedies as two parts of one historical development and by contrasting them to opposing arguments. The title of the monograph cites Avrom Sutzkever’s poem Encamped Gypsies, amplifying Joscowitz’s view that the recognition of entanglements between the two victim groups’ experiences during and following the Holocaust teaches meaningful and long-lasting historical lessons for generations to come.

The chapters follow chronological order, from discussing the similarities and differences between pre-1933 biases and legal discrimination against Jews and Roma through their persecution in Nazi Europe, postwar reconstruction, and involvement in and advocacy for seeking justice in courts of law, to the establishment of institutions of remembrance and scholarship and the emergence of a “memory collaboration” between Jews and Roma. Joscowitz stresses that the two groups’ experiences before, during, and after the Holocaust should be explored as one continuity and in consideration of the asymmetries between their socio-economic status, mobility, and capacity for effective self-representation. Joscowitz’s study also emphasizes the historical nature of the knowledge and memory of the events taking place before and during the genocide. Survivors remembering and seeking justice and compensation, researchers and legal experts amassing documentary evidence of the crimes committed against Jews and Roma, librarians and archivists collecting and arranging the records of the crimes, death, and survival, and historians, institutions, politicians, and activists continue producing public knowledge of the past that comes with significant financial and non-tangible costs. Their work shapes the dialogue between the two groups and the majority societies in which they live. This title is recommended for academic, public, and synagogue libraries.

Katalin Rac,  
Emory University, Atlanta, GA


Lance J. Sussman is both an ordained Reform rabbi and a holder of a Ph.D. in American Jewish history. He served as Senior Rabbi at Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania from 2001-2022 and has held other rabbinical posts. He is also a published author, editor, and has taught at a number of colleges and universities. He continues to be actively involved in Jewish rabbinical life and in researching, writing, and teaching a wide array of areas of Jewish experience in the U.S. and internationally. He currently serves as the Memoirs Section Editor of the Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society, Vice President of the North American Board of Rabbis, and Vice President of the Philadelphia Board of Rabbis. Clearly, Rabbi Sussman brings a richly informed perspective on American Jewish life with deep knowledge about its history and active engagement in its contemporary development and shaping its future direction. His memoir takes the reader through his career from 2001-2022 and intersperses his sermons on a multiplicity of subjects of Jewish concern, from the meaning of weekly Torah portions and Talmudic teachings to the place of Israel in American Jewish life. Rabbi Sussman shares his reflections on the lived experience of being a rabbi, encompassing its evolution over time and the concrete demands of the position, as well as the transformation of Reform Judaism over his rabbinical career.

The book is divided into four parts: Part 1—In the Beginning, 2001-2006; Part 2—A Little Religion Is a Good Thing, 2007-2011; Part 3—A Night of Watching, 2012-2016; and Part 4—Crossroads, Conflicts and Challenges, 2017-2022 (the longest section). This book will be of interest to both researchers and general readers and should find a place in academic, synagogue, and community center libraries.

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

Continued on page 39

*Re-Forming Judaism* is an edited volume that discusses moments of disruption to Judaism and the Jewish people across history. Starting from Sinai and ending at the present, the chapters cover every aspect of Judaism across time and topic. While *Re-Forming Judaism* is a more academic book, it is an enjoyable read. Chapter lengths make them more accessible, ensuring that the point is clear. A few chapters are specifically tied to Reform thought and theology, which might hurt the appeal to some and increase the appeal to others. The contributors come from a variety of viewpoints, religious and academic. Overall, it is a well-written, organized, and thought-out volume that could be an excellent addition to many libraries. This book is likely too advanced for most students for a school library. There is enough appeal that a public library with a large Jewish community might want this on their shelves. A more academic library would likely want a copy given the more advanced writing in the book.

*COOKBOOKS*


In 1952, Debbie and Judy Chein were born as identical twins. Debbie, the younger of the two, always dreamed of a close sisterly bond, typical of twins. To Debbie, having a twin meant a life filled with dressing up alike, wearing the same hairstyle, and sharing deep secrets. While Debbie believed that she and Judy shared a strong bond, this dream was not to be realized in the traditional sense since Judy was born with Cerebral Palsy. The girls came from a tight, loving observant family of parents, grandparents, and two older brothers. In the 1950s, it was typical to institutionalize a severely disabled child. However, her parents were adamant that Judy was much better off being raised at home, believing the love of family is the best environment for her. This also meant including Judy on their vacations, two of them to Israel.

This is a short, but courageous account of one sister’s description of her special relationship with her disabled twin, focusing on the last few years of Judy’s life. This was the period during which Debbie assumed guardianship, making her responsible for making difficult life and death decisions. One of the most difficult decisions Debbie had to make was to move Judy to a long-term facility. To help Debbie deal with the stress and guilt, her therapist suggested chronicling her life during the last few years of Judy’s life.

Sharing some of her journal entries, Debbie is brutally honest with herself and her readers as she must navigate the heavy emotional roller-coaster of feelings of doubt, guilt, regret, dashed hopes, and the difficult reality of what quality of life is to someone suffering the physical pain of CP. Up until the final months of Judy’s life, Debbie had to face the realization that her dream vision of twinship would never come to fruition, but she spent a lifetime giving her sister the support and respect she deserved. Fortunately, Debbie had the unwavering support of her husband and children.

A heartfelt memoir, most appropriate for the adult section of a synagogue library.

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


Memory and recipes from the Jews of South Carolina are the focus of this beautifully photographed book. Most of the recipes are traditional Eastern European recipes that are found in numerous other cookbooks. Some of the recipes are adapted from African American housekeepers and cooks who worked in Jewish homes. The book is divided into six sections. An interesting recipe in the first section is African American cook Ethel Glover’s collard greens, which she adapts for a kosher home. Also noteworthy is Richard Weedman’s savory chicken, a traditional southern comfort food. The rest of the recipes in this section, such as Grandma Ida’s lokshen kugel, kishka, kreplach, and matzah balls are traditional Jewish fare. Preceding the recipes is a compelling history of the person who brought it from Europe or who passed it down through generations. The histories are complemented by numerous family photographs that include the bakeries, groceries, and retail stores owned by Jews.
Some of the recipes were jotted down on scraps of paper or index cards. Some were passed down through word of mouth or observation of the cook and recreation of the recipe. The recipes in chapter two, “Southern Roots,” originate in small South Carolina towns where they are modified by Jewish cooks; for example, adding schmaltz to okra gumbo. The third chapter tells the story of Jewish-owned groceries and bakeries, one of which brought pumpernickel bread to South Carolina. Another chapter titled, “Around the Jewish Table,” chronicles the generosity and warmth of a small tight-knit community.

A glossary of Yiddish terms, a list of contributors, and a recipe index are included at the end of the book. Although many of the recipes have been printed in other books, the stories of those who live in South Carolina make this book a worthwhile addition to both the cookbook and history collections of all libraries.

Ilka Gordon,  
Beachwood, OH


Jake Cohen good for the Jews? With the introduction of his second cookbook, *I Could Nosh: Classic Jew-ish Recipes Revamped for Every Day*, Cohen answers why he wrote a second cookbook of Jewish food by saying, “with everything I do in my life and work, I strive to focus on Jewish joy. This book is meant to capture the joy I’ve felt these past two years, cooking for those who mean the most to me” and with that he brings readers a cookbook of food that answers the question “are you hungry?” Written with a lot of humor, snark, and a bit of profanity, Cohen puts a new spin on many familiar recipes. Kasha varnishkes for every season! Chicken soup with Gondi (Persian chicken and chickpea dumplings)! A chicken salad sandwich that pays homage to the Hillel Sandwich of the Passover Seder. For those who like to cook a lot and eat, there is a whole chapter called “There Will Be Leftovers,” which proved to be true for this reviewer after making the T’beet, a delicious Iraqi Baked Chicken and Rice dish. The plethora of schmear and dip recipes will keep noshers happy from Matbucha to Honey-Whipped Ricotta with Sage.

As Cohen puts forth, this is a “Jew-ish” cookbook, so not an explicitly Kosher cookbook, but with only one explicitly treif recipe (Bacon, Egg, and Cheese Challah Strata) the entire cookbook is easily adaptable to the Kosher cook, with Cohen’s encouragement in the introduction to “Be a dairy or nondairy queen.” This is an excellent addition to any library (or home) cookbook collection.

Rebecca Levitan,  
Librarian, Baltimore County Public Library  
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