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MEDIA RELEASE

**2009 SYDNEY TAYLOR BOOK AWARDS  
ANNOUNCED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH LIBRARIES**

(New York—January 7, 2009) **Richard Michelson** and **Raul Colon**, author and illustrator of ***As Good As Anybody: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel's Amazing March Toward Freedom***, **Karen Hesse**, author of ***Brooklyn Bridge***, and **Valerie Zenatti**, author of ***A Bottle in the Gaza Sea***, are the 2009 winners of the prestigious Sydney Taylor Book Award.

The Sydney Taylor Book Award honors new books for children and teens that exemplify the highest literary standards while authentically portraying the Jewish experience. The award memorializes Sydney Taylor, author of the classic *All-of-a-Kind Family* series. The winners will receive their awards at the Association of Jewish Libraries convention in Chicago this July.

Michelson and Colon will receive the 2009 gold medal in the Sydney Taylor Book Award's Younger Readers Category for ***As Good As Anybody: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel's Amazing March Toward Freedom***, published by **Alfred A. Knopf**. Two very special clergymen, one a rabbi, the other an African-American reverend are raised in divergently different countries yet experience similar levels of persecution and bigotry that will one day bring them together. As colleagues in America's struggle for civil rights, they march together from Selma to Montgomery in March 1965. Colon's colored pencil and watercolor illustrations "offer a beautiful complement to the text, describing two unique paths from childhood to adult life – Martin's in the rich, warm brown-tones of the American south and Abraham's in cool blues and grays that reminded the illustrator of old World War II movies. When the two exemplary men join in their march for tolerance, the palettes merge in full color harmony," comments Debbie Colodny, a member of the Award Committee. This book is recommended for grades 2-5.

Hesse will receive the 2009 gold medal in the Sydney Taylor Book Award's Older Readers Category for ***Brooklyn Bridge***, published by **Feiwel & Friends**. While his family left the anti-Semitism of Russia to build the American dream, Joey Michtom's dream is to visit the glittering Coney Island. "Crafting a story from the spark of a true event, the invention of the Teddy Bear in 1903, Hesse masterfully weaves multiple themes of hard-work, survival, homelessness, and familial dedication with interlocking and parallel stories of families who live reasonably well opposite those less fortunate

living in the shadows below the imposing Brooklyn Bridge," comments Rita Soltan, a member of the Award Committee. This book is recommended for grades 5-8. Hesse also won the 1992 Award for Older Readers for *Letters from Rifka*, and a 2004 Honor Award for Older Readers for *The Cats in Kransinski Square*.

Zenatti will receive the 2009 gold medal in the Sydney Taylor Book Award's Teen Readers Category for *A Bottle in the Gaza Sea*, published by **Bloomsbury**. "This story about the relationship between an Israeli girl, Tal, and a Palestinian boy, Naim, via e-mail and instant messaging, is honest but hopeful. Well-written and compelling, the tale of their relationship conveys the confusion, anger, exhaustion, and depression felt by many young people during the 2003 intifada," comments Susan Berson, a member of the Award Committee. Zenatti's memoir, *When I Was a Soldier*, was a 2005-6 AJL Notable Book for Older Readers.

Six Sydney Taylor Honor Books were named for 2009. For Younger Readers, Honor Books are: *Engineer Ari and the Rosh Hashanah Ride* by **Deborah Bodin Cohen** with illustrations by **Shahar Kober** (Kar-Ben), *Sarah Laughs* by **Jacqueline Jules** with illustrations by **Natascia Ugliano** (Kar-Ben), *A is for Abraham: A Jewish Family Alphabet* by Richard Michelson with illustrations by Ron Mazellan (Sleeping Bear Press) and *Naming Liberty* by Jane Yolen with paintings by Jim Burke (Philomel Books). Aranka Siegal's *Memories of Babi* (Farrar Straus and Giroux) was named an Honor Book for Older Readers, and *Freefall* by Anna Levine (Greenwillow Books) was named an Honor Book in the Teen Reader Category.

In addition to the medal-winners, the Award Committee designated twenty-two Notable Books of Jewish Content for 2009: six in the Younger Readers Category, ten in the Older Readers Category, and four for Teens. *Genesis—the Book with Seventy Faces: A Guide for the Family* by Esther Takac with illustrations by Anna Pignataro (Pitspopany Press) and *Celebrating with Jewish Crafts* by Rebecca Edid Ruzansky with photographs by Roberto Zeballos-Peralta (self-published) impressed the Award Committee with their uniqueness and range. They have been designated Notable Books for all ages. Notable titles, and more information about the Sydney Taylor Book Award, may be found online at [www.SydneyTaylorBookAward.org](http://www.SydneyTaylorBookAward.org). Interviews with winning authors will be posted on prominent children's literature blogs as part of a "blog tour" beginning on January 18, 2009; details will be posted on the Sydney Taylor Book Award Blog at [www.sydneytaylorbookaward.blogspot.com](http://www.sydneytaylorbookaward.blogspot.com).

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