

## **Circus Story Wins 2010 Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award**

The Sydney Taylor Manuscript Award Committee has selected *On the Run* by Joan Schoettler as the winner of the 2010 award. *On the Run* is a middle grade novel loosely based on the heroic actions of Maria and Adolf Althoff, a circus master and his wife, who hid members of a Jewish family for several years during the Holocaust. In 1995, the Althoffs were recognized as "Righteous Gentiles among the nations."

*On the Run* is the story of eleven-year-old Janna who has been hiding for two years. When Janna and her mother are forced to flee again, Janna's grandmother, a former circus performer, sends them to an old friend. Confined to a tiny room, Janna and her mother create a world for themselves.

The story is peopled with unique characters: the circus master and his wife, a deaf-mute who shares the circus wagon with Janna and her mother, an unfaithful friend, members of the underground. The book is rife with the tension of surprise visits from German soldiers as well as the fear of betrayal from within the circus. This tension holds until the very end when Janna hears soldiers outside the circus wagon. But this time, instead of hiding, Janna leaves the wagon to find in front of her "good men," not the tall-blacked booted German soldiers.

The committee was impressed by the uniqueness of this story and the character development, as well as the way Jewish values are infused into the story. While *On the Run* is a Holocaust book, the treatment is original and the elements of adventure, mystery and intrigue draw the reader into the story. The reader becomes aware of the danger Jews faced during the war years but are not terrified by horrific details. Readers will especially identify with Janna and the tension under which she lived.

As one reviewer stated, "This is a work which simply reveals human nature at its most selfless while also describing examples of the opposite, all told in a manner appropriate for 8 to 11 year old readers."

The author, a former classroom reading teacher and literacy specialist, has been teaching children's literature at California State University, Fresno since 1994. Ms Schoettler shares her large collection of Holocaust picture and chapter books with university students every semester. Ms Schoettler is elated by the honor given her story. "Children must know and understand the ordeal others before them have had to struggle through as a result of injustice," she said. "Now I have the responsibility to take it one step further by doing all I can to find the right publisher for this manuscript."