

**SYDNEY TAYLOR AWARD WINNER FOR YOUNGER READERS:
PRESENTATION**

Libby White

For me, it is a joy and a privilege to be associated with the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee. If you are old enough to have grown children or have been involved with children's work for a considerable time—even though you definitely don't look it—you will recall how difficult it used to be to find attractive and worthy literature for Jewish children. There was little to convey the rich, warm and varied culture in which we hoped to interest our young readers. Poorly designed volumes, dull and didactic texts were the rule. Then came Sydney Taylor and her ALL OF A KIND FAMILY series. The publication in the 1950's of Taylor's stories of Jewish immigrant life ushered in a Golden Age of Jewish children's literature, which thrives still. Jewish children saw themselves in ALL OF A KIND FAMILY and in its successors as part of the American mosaic, and readers of all backgrounds came to appreciate a common bond. Equally important was Sydney Taylor's craftsmanship. She taught us about standards—to demand excellence in Jewish-themed books for children. The Sydney Taylor Book Awards were created by the Association of Jewish Libraries and Ralph Taylor, Sydney's husband, to honor the author. The first awards were given in 1969 to recognize books published in 1968.

The winner of the 2001 award for Younger Readers is RIVKA'S FIRST THANKSGIVING by Elsa Okon Rael, illustrated by Maryann Kovalski. This picture book revolves around a small immigrant girl's attempt to fit into her new American surroundings. This book was published by Margaret K. McElderry, a Simon and Schuster imprint. Author Elsa Rael is a native of New York City, where she still lives. Elsa was first a playwright. In fact, nine of her plays have been produced Off Broadway and in regional theater. Elsa turned her hand to children's books as a result of prodding from members of her writers' group, who were enchanted by her stories of life on the Lower East Side. Elsa's books have been honored by ALA and the Children's Book Council. In 1997 her WHEN ZAYDE DANCED ON ELDRIDGE STREET received our award. Speaking of "not looking it," Elsa informed me that she has become a great-grandmother since her last Sydney Taylor Book Award!