

Media Release



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For Immediate Release

NEWBERY-WINNING AUTHOR REMEMBERS *ALL-OF-A-KIND FAMILY*



One autumn morning, young Linda Sue Park came down to breakfast and told her mother she was fasting for Yom Kippur. “I then had to explain to her that Yom Kippur is a Jewish holiday,” says Park, whose family is Korean-American--and Presbyterian.

“I wanted to emulate the characters from one of my favorite books, *All-of-a-Kind Family* by Sydney Taylor,” explains Park, author of the 2002 Newbery Medal winner *A Single Shard*, a historical novel set in 12th century Korea. “The *All-of-a-Kind Family* series brought Jewish customs and holidays to life for me and I felt that the girls in the stories were my friends. Mom finally called her friend, Mrs. Kaplan, who convinced me it was okay to eat.”

A book-lover from an early age, Park always sought out stories about other cultures. Some of her favorites were *Roosevelt Grady* by Louisa Shotwell and *What Then, Raman?* by Shirley Arora. The *All-of-a-Kind Family* books had a strong impact on her too. “After reading them, I wanted to be Jewish and even asked my mother how I could convert to Judaism.”

Many people feel strongly about *All-of-a-Kind Family*, and the author of this beloved series has been memorialized with a medal, the “Sydney Taylor Book Award,” by the Association of Jewish Libraries. The award promotes excellence in Jewish children’s literature by recognizing authentic portrayals of Jewish life in novels, picture books, and even non-fiction. “Taylor’s were the first Jewish books to really attract an audience outside the Jewish community, the first to go mainstream,” says Heidi Estrin, Chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee. “To honor her legacy, we seek out titles with that same emotional pull, stories that connect Jewish and universal human traits to create a truly interesting read.”

“When I heard Linda Sue Park speak about her writing, and about the effect *All-of-a-Kind Family* had on her, I was stunned,” says Rachel Kamin, a member of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee. “It brought home to me the importance of recognizing great Jewish children’s literature, not only for Jewish readers but also for others, for whom literature might help them feel comfortable with a different ethnicity outside their own sphere.”

The 2003 winner of the Sydney Taylor Book Award in the Younger Readers category, *Bagels From Benny* by Aubrey Davis, tells of a young boy who tries to thank God for his bounty and finds that reaching out to other people is a way of reaching out to God. The 2003 winner in the Older Readers category, *Who Was the Woman Who Wore the Hat?* by Nancy Patz, poetically imagines the individuality of an anonymous Holocaust victim, and puts the reader into her shoes, or more literally, her hat. “Both of these titles stress the importance of each person’s life, and emphasize what a blessing life is,” says Estrin. “Both are about Jewish values and Jewish experiences, but also express universal values and ideas to which any reader can relate.”

“The danger of ethnic book awards is ghettoization,” says Linda Sue Park. “If we put books with Jewish characters aside and label them ‘Jewish books for Jewish children’ that would be a real shame. Ethnic book awards should create connections, not limitations. The best literature, and I consider the *All-of-a-Kind Family* books to be among the best, should have the ability to speak to a large number of people without limits based on race, ethnicity, culture, or religion.”

The Association of Jewish Libraries lists past and present Sydney Taylor Book Award winners online at www.jewishlibraries.org so that all readers can have access to them. “The Award engenders Jewish pride, and helps build bridges of understanding at the same time,” says Estrin. “It really honors the all-American spirit of Sydney Taylor’s *All-of-a-Kind Family* books.”

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