

GLOSSARY

Please note that Yiddish is spoken in many dialects; the pronunciations given here are not the only correct ones.

latke (LAHT-kuh): A Yiddish word for a small potato pancake. Latkes are traditionally eaten during Hanukkah.

Mäusele (MOYZ-uh-luh): An old-fashioned, Yiddish-influenced German pet name meaning “little mouse.”

menorah (men-AW-ra): A Hebrew word used in English for a nine-branched candleholder. It has one branch for each of the eight nights of Hanukkah, plus one for the shamash.

schmaltz (SHMOLTS): A Yiddish word for clarified poultry fat. Before the mid-twentieth century, schmaltz was used to fry latkes. Goose fat was best!

shamash (shah-MASH): A Hebrew word meaning “servant.” The shamash is the helper candle on the menorah. It is lit first and used to light the others.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Sydney Taylor (1904–1978) was born four years after her traditionally religious Jewish family arrived in America to settle on New York City’s Lower East Side. Her parents, Morris and Cecilia, came from Germany, though Morris was originally from Poland. There were five girls, as in the *All-of-a-Kind Family* stories. Later, three boys were born, though only two survived.

As a young adult, the author changed her name from Sarah to Sydney. She grew up to be an actor and a modern dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company. Later, she worked as a drama and dance counselor at a Jewish summer camp. As an adult, she was progressive and no longer observant, but she kept a strong Jewish identity.

In 1925, Sydney married Ralph Taylor. They had a daughter, Jo. “When Jo was little,” Taylor said in *More Books by More People*, “I would sit beside her bed at night and try to make up for the lack of a big family by telling her about my own.” Jo loved the stories, so Taylor wrote them down. One day, her husband secretly sent her manuscript to a contest sponsored by the Follett Publishing Company. She won.

All-of-a-Kind Family was published in 1951. Taylor became the first writer to publish books about Jewish children that reached readers from other religions. The books also gave Jewish children a mirror of their own traditions on the page.

The first book was so successful that Taylor wrote four sequels and a number of other books. The Sydney Taylor Book Award is now given every year by the Association of Jewish Libraries.

The **Lower East Side** of New York City was at one time the largest Jewish neighborhood in the world. Most of the immigrants there came from Germany, Russia, Poland, Romania, and Hungary. They spoke Yiddish. Others came from Greece, Turkey, and other parts of the Ottoman Empire. All of them had fled poverty and oppression to start new lives.

In 1912, housing in that area was mainly tenements: five- and six-story buildings, many of which had no running water. The all-of-a-kind family lives in an unusual two-story building.

The Lower East Side was a lively and culturally rich neighborhood, but overcrowding led to crime and disease. In *More Books by More People*, Taylor explained how it felt growing up there: “There was poverty, sickness, and unsanitary conditions, with the breadwinners working ten, twelve and fourteen hours a day for meager wages. But over and above all was the intoxicating joy in the freedom long denied the immigrants in their ‘old countries.’ . . . Here in this new land schools were free and libraries open to all.”

Hanukkah, or the Festival of Lights, is one of many Jewish holidays in Taylor’s books. It celebrates two miracles and happens over eight nights each year. Here is the story:

Long ago in Jerusalem, the Jewish people were ruled by Antiochus, a wicked king. He ordered the Jews to stop worshipping as they believed. A group led by Judah Maccabee fought back. Antiochus took over the Jewish temple. It looked as if there was no way Judah and his brothers could ever beat the king's huge army, but a miracle occurred: victory.

The Jews returned to their temple. They had to cleanse it in an eight-day ceremony, but oh no! There was only enough pure lamp oil to light the temple for one night. That's when a second miracle happened: that oil burned for all eight nights.

On Hanukkah, we put menorahs in windows to publicize these miracles. Money or *gelt* is a traditional Hanukkah gift for children. Kids also play dreidel, a spinning-top game. We eat fried foods like latkes and doughnuts because of the oil in the second miracle.

I grew up with Taylor's books and read them over and over. Now my children love them as much as I do.

My father is Jewish. His grandparents came to New York from Poland and Russia around the time Sydney Taylor was born. I was raised to remember this part of my family history. Now I share these books with my children as one of the ways we connect with our heritage. I am honored to have written a small chapter in the lives of Taylor's characters.

A NOTE FROM THE ILLUSTRATOR

The pictures I *intended* to draw for Emily's charming manuscript would reflect the popular esthetic of the 1910s: all lace and frills, meticulously detailed and decorated. But instead, my drawings came out quite loose and rough, as you can see. What happened?

It was largely about getting the feeling right. I quickly saw that delicate lines were wrong for Gertie's passionate nature; realistic space didn't reflect her sense of place in the world. Bolder outlines and simpler shapes, with almost no lighting or atmospherics, made the pictures ring truer—more like children's art, where the laws of perspective don't apply.

It was also about art. Though American illustration and popular art of the 1910s remained traditional, an art movement that would become known as Expressionism was growing in Europe and elsewhere, in which artists tried rough brushwork, wild perspective, and other strategies to heighten emotions in a way classical representation could not. I liked the idea of linking Gertie and her family to this budding world of creativity. Sydney Taylor's real family was deeply connected to art throughout their lives.

Now that I'm done, when I consider how I worked on these pictures, trying to rough them up when they got too smooth, to flatten them out when they got too round, to maintain a sense of texture throughout, I think that perhaps what I was really trying to do was represent the qualities of a good potato latke! Take a look at one, very close up, and see if you agree.

SYDNEY TAYLOR'S ALL-OF-A-KIND FAMILY BOOKS

All-of-a-Kind Family (1951)

More All-of-a-Kind Family (1954)

All-of-a-Kind Family Uptown (1958)

All-of-a-Kind Family Downtown (1972)

Ella of All-of-a-Kind Family (1978)

For a link to additional back matter, including a latke recipe, visit AllofaKindFamilyHanukkahExtras.com.

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