



## Levine-Sklut Judaic Library and Resource Center



### The New American Girl Doll: She's Jewish, She's Poor and Her Name is Rebecca

By Sue Fishkoff

San Francisco (JTA) — It's official: The newest American Girl doll is nine-year-old Rebecca Rubin, a Jewish-American girl who lives with her family on Manhattan's Lower East Side in 1914.

The much-anticipated latest addition to the American Girl series of historical characters, Rebecca went on sale May 31 along with six books about her life. No cheap date, she costs \$95 with one book, or \$118 if accompanied by the complete set.

Rebecca joins 14 other historical dolls in the series — from Kaya, a Nez Perce girl set in 1764, to African-American Addy, a Civil War doll, to World War II-era Molly, part of an Irish immigrant family. Her unveiling will include



American Girl Rebecca Rubin and her introductory book.

a tie-in at the Tenement Museum in New York City and a harbor cruise with "kosher-style" food, according to USA Today.

She's a feisty girl, our Rebecca. In one book she rescues her cousin

Anna from the top of a stalled Ferris wheel. In another she marches in a garment workers' strike and gives an impassioned speech about labor rights. But she also cooks, crochets and dreams of becoming a movie star, just like a proper lass.

Rebecca lives with her Russian-immigrant parents, siblings and grandparents in a Lower East Side row house, just a step up from the tenements of Orchard Street, and they struggle mightily to save boat fare to bring more family over from the Old Country.

The Jewish blogosphere has been floating guesses about her name, release date and details of her life for more than a year with an intensity that belied her insensate status. She is, after all, just a doll, albeit a soft-bodied, large and quite beautiful one. But Jews love history, especially their own, and Jewish parents hip to the American Girl formula of nicely made dolls and well-written books about the period of American history they represent wanted a piece of their own people's story to give their daughters.

"This is our history, right here in this doll," says author Meredith Jacobs of Rockville, MD, host of "The Modern Jewish Mom" on The Jewish Channel.

Jacobs' family is also from Eastern Europe, and her Uncle Saul's dreams of becoming an actor were dashed by family pressure to enter the cantorate.

Jacobs plans to buy Rebecca and her books for her 13-year-old daughter, Sophie, even though she's just beyond the target demographic.

"I want her to read the books and talk to my parents about our history," Jacobs says. "I don't think people who aren't Jewish think about how big a deal it is for a mainstream doll company to make something Jewish."

Rebecca confronts many of the same dilemmas faced by today's American Jewish children as they navigate between tradition and modernity. In "Candlelight for Rebecca," her teacher asks the class to make Christmas centerpieces, and Rebecca agonizes over what to tell her parents. In "Meet Rebecca," she asks her father, an observant Jew who keeps kosher, why he opens his shoe store on Shabbat. (They need the money, he explains).

Children's author Jacqueline Dembar Greene penned the six books about Rebecca's life, basing some of the stories on her own family's history. She quizzed her mother-in-law about the correct usage of certain Yiddish words and her 92-year-old father about his memories of riding the Ferris Wheel at Coney Island.

Greene's mother worked as a

stitcher in a garment factory in Hartford, CT, much like the one where Rebecca's uncle and cousin suffered two decades earlier.

"Nothing had changed," Greene says. "She told me about the bosses walking up and down yelling at the workers, about being locked in even though it was totally illegal. They weren't allowed to talk or hum; they were timed when they went to the bathroom."

Even the Christmas story came out of her own experience. Greene was in third grade in the 1950s when her teacher asked the class to make Christmas decorations.

"I brought mine home and burst into tears," she recalls. "My wise, wise mother said, 'I bet Mrs. Crocker would love it.'"

Mrs. Crocker was a widowed neighbor, much like the widower Mr. Rossi in Rebecca's book, whom the fictional character gives her own Christmas decoration.

"I gave it to her," Greene says, "and walked home feeling proud as punch." ☆

Rebecca's books are available at the Levine-Sklut Judaic Library and Resource Center.

#### Thank you to everyone who participated in our Summer Reading Journey!

The program was a huge success!

If you have not picked up your prizes, please come and see us by August 7. Don't forget your passport! Story Time with a Hebrew Twist a Huge Success Crystal Ben-Yohanan, whose native tongue is Hebrew, entertained our campers with stories, songs and games that helped introduce new words that the kids will remember for years to come.



### An Evening to Honor Sam Bernstein

The Levine-Sklut Judaic Library and Resource Center, a Beneficiary Agency of the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte, invites you to an evening honoring Sam Bernstein. Featuring a concert by the UNC Jewish a cappella group Sababa, Saturday, October 24.

If you would like to help sponsor this event, please contact Talli Dippold at 704-944-6780 or [tdippold@shalomcharlotte.org](mailto:tdippold@shalomcharlotte.org).

Sponsorships available:

\*Nobel Laureate: \$500 and up  
\*Pulitzer Prize: \$250 to \$499

\*will be listed on invitations and programs

Publisher: \$100 to \$249  
Editor: \$50 to \$99

Author: up to \$49

will be listed in programs  
Invitations to follow.

## WOMEN'S NEWS

### Young Judaea Celebrates 100 Years

By Bunny Bramson, president, Charlotte Chapter of Hadassah

Founded in 1909, Young Judaea is the oldest Zionist youth movement in the United States. Dedicated to instilling Jewish values, Jewish pride and a lifelong commitment to Israel, Young Judaea challenges Jewish youth — through clubs, conventions, camps, Israel programs and university campus events — to become involved in social and educational activities that develop and sharpen the senses of Jewish and Zionist identity.

As a pluralistic movement, Young Judaea has brought together generations of young Jews from a rich variety of religious, cultural and political backgrounds, underscoring beauty, power and diversity of American Jewish life. Young Judaea reaches out to all Jewish youth — Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist and unaffiliated — and provides opportunities for them to explore their Jewishness and to develop lasting identification with Zionism. Kashrut, Shabbat and Jewish holidays are observed

throughout all Young Judaea programs and activities.

Through the years, Young Judaea has striven to remain true to its principles and ideology, the main focus being Zionism. Young Judaea uses Israel as the prism through which its members see the world. While Jewish education and Jewish identity are essential to the functioning of the movement, it is Zionist identity that has been



Bunny Bramson

treated as a priority in terms of education and social action.

Shlichim (emissaries from Israel) serve as partners with American professionals in the on-going education process. Affiliations with sister movements in Great Britain and Israel allow for international exchange of ideas and sharing of goals.

For more information about Young Judaea, contact Hadassah's Young Judaea chairman, Dana

Kapustin at [dkapustin@carolina.rr.com](mailto:dkapustin@carolina.rr.com). ☆



### Donating an Old Cell Phone Can Save a Life

Shalom Bayit-NC, in conjunction with the North Carolina Women's Commission, is collecting cell phones for victims — or potential victims — of domestic violence. Old, used and unwanted cell phones will be reprogrammed to call 911 and used in the event of an emergency. Donating is as simple as dropping the cell phone and battery charger (in a plastic bag, if possible) at the reception desks of the following locations: Levine Jewish Community Center, Ohr Hatorah Congregation, Temple Beth El, Temple Israel, Jewish Family Services.

For more information contact Marsha Stickler at 704-756-9209 or e-mail at [info@shalombayit-nc.org](mailto:info@shalombayit-nc.org). ☆



Lake Norman Hadassah held the installation of the new board for the 2009-2010 year at a dinner held at Max and Erma's Restaurant in Huntersville on Monday, June 22. The ladies of the outgoing board were thanked for their service and the new board, headed by Rita Eilenberg as President, were each welcomed to their new portfolio with the presentation of a long-stemmed rose. Planning meetings for the coming year's programs will be held in August with general meetings to start in September.