



JEWISH CURRENT EVENTS

ALL THE NEWS YOUNG JEWS CAN USE!

www.jewishcurrentevents.com

Celebrating 50 years!
5 SIVAN 5759

MAY 28, 2009

In the U.S.

Mazal Tov, "Rebecca" on being the first Jewish American Girl Doll

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) -- The first Jewish historical doll in the American Girl series goes on sale at the end of the month.

Rebecca Rubin is a 9-year-old girl living on the Lower East Side in 1914. She lives with her parents, grandparents and four siblings in a row house -- a step up from the poverty of tenement life -- and they struggle to bring the rest of the family over from Russia.

The 18-inch-tall doll, which officially goes on sale May 31, comes with six books about her life and the immigrant world of 1914 New York. Rebecca confronts many of the same dilemmas faced by today's American Jewish children, such as learning to navigate between X-mas and Chanukah, and also stands up for workers' rights in the early days of unionizing.

"This is our history, right here in this doll," says author Meredith Jacobs. "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."

The Rebecca doll joins 14 others in the American Girl historical character series, including a Native American, Latino and African-American.



In Washington, D.C.

Sotomayor's Jewish ties

Jewish groups don't endorse US Supreme Court nominees, at least in writing.

The tears and choked sobs when Sonia Sotomayor accepted President Obama's nomination on Tuesday told another story.

Packed into the room along with Sotomayor's family, friends and colleagues were representatives of Jewish groups that have consulted with the White House about prospective replacements for David Souter.

"It was impossible not to be moved by her personal story," said Mark Pelavin, the associate director of the Reform movement's Religious Action Center. "To see her mother sitting there and think about what this says about her and her country - the combination of someone who grew up in a housing project, who has been on the bench for a long time, but who has been a prosecutor as well, that combination is very powerful."

"It was thrilling," said Sammie Moshenberg, the Washington director of the National Council of Jewish Women.

It doesn't hurt that Sotomayor, 54, is a poster child for strong Jewish-Hispanic relations. In 1986, when she was in private legal practice, she joined one of the first young leadership tours of Israel sponsored by Project Interchange, which is affiliated with the American Jewish Committee.

Sotomayor so enjoyed the country - its immigrant culture, its popular music influenced heavily by Jewish immigrants from Argentina and Brazil - that she made a return visit in 1996 when she was a federal judge, and recently joined a Project Interchange US-Israel forum on immigration.



Knesset gives initial support to bill punishing denial of Israel's right to exist

—After a heated debate, the Knesset gave its initial approval on Wednesday to a bill that would make it a crime to publicly deny Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, punishable by a sentence of up to a year in prison. The publication of any "call to negate Israel's existence as a Jewish and democratic state, where the content of such publication would have a reasonable possibility of causing an act of hatred, disdain or disloyalty" to Israel, would be outlawed.

The controversial bill will have to pass three additional votes by the Knesset and a committee review before becoming law. Forty-seven Knesset members voted in favor of the motion, 34 voted against it, and one abstained. The bill was initiated by Zevulun Orlev, who serves as chairman of the Knesset's Education Committee.

In Israel

Israeli parliament marks Yiddish Culture Day

Long disparaged in Hebrew-speaking Israel as the native tongue of Diaspora Jews, the centuries-old lingo made a comeback Tuesday with the first ever Yiddish Culture Day.

Marking 150 years since the birth of Sholem Aleichem, the popular Russian-Jewish author of Yiddish literature, and 20

years since the establishment of the Yiddish theater in Tel Aviv, lawmakers gathered to discuss ways to preserve and promote the German-based language written with the Hebrew alphabet.

It was the language of Jews of eastern Europe. They were decimated in the Nazi Holocaust of World War II, just as the founders of the Jewish state were promoting Hebrew and ridiculing Yiddish, leaving the language without a wide base.

At Israel's parliament on Tuesday, organizers handed out a Yiddish handbook to lawmakers so they could study poignant Yiddishisms, and guests were treated to a Yiddish concert.

Yiddish traces its origins to the 10th century and flourished among Jewish Ashkenazi culture in the 20th century before the Holocaust.

Sholem Aleichem's Yiddish stories about Tevye the Milkman were the inspiration for the 1964 musical "Fiddler on the Roof." The most notable Yiddish writer of recent years is Isaac Bashevis Singer.

The language is currently spoken in patches of ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in Israel, the United States, the former Soviet Union and elsewhere.

"People have been eulogizing Yiddish for 500 years, but it is much too soon for that — Yiddish will live on forever," said lawmaker Lia Shemtov, chairwoman of the parliamentary lobby for the preservation of Yiddish. "It is more than a language. It is the culture and the history of our people."

Zevulun Orlev, a 63-year-old lawmaker, recalled how Yiddish was his mother tongue as a child in Israel before he and his older sister forced their Polish-born parents to adopt the local language.

"So my parents learned Hebrew, but we lost our Yiddish," he said. "Today, I regret that very much. Only now, when we have shed our Diaspora complex, do we feel secure enough in our Israeli identity to appreciate this rich language."



In Holland

Jewish woman wins an Arab poetry contest using pseudonym

Tuvit Shlomi, 28, who works at the Center for Information and Documentation on Israel and attends an Orthodox synagogue in The Hague, won the prestigious El Hizra Prize, a poetry award designed to promote the culture of Arab immigrants to Holland, particularly those from Morocco.

In a bid to ensure her work would be judged on the merits of its content rather than authorship, Shlomi submitted her poems using the pseudonym Wallada bint al-Mustaqfi, who was an 11th-century Andalusian poet and feminist.

"With an Israeli name, I could imagine they would see the entry and say 'nope,'" Shlomi told JTA in a telephone interview.

The award recognizes emerging poets in Dutch, Arabic and Berber. Shlomi won in the 26-plus age category for her poems "My Dream is Dead" and "Ready for Winter."

In accordance with regulations, Shlomi informed contest organizers of her real name.

Abderazak Sbaiti, director of the El Hizra Center for Arabic Art and Culture, told a Dutch daily he was pleased for Shlomi.

Shlomi's participation "proves how multicultural the Netherlands are," Sbaiti said.

Noting that the contest was not limited to those of Moroccan or Arabic background, he said, "We accept all cultures."

The results of the contest were announced last week.

One of the contest's judges, Erik Lindner, said Shlomi's concerns about using her real name were unfounded. Poems were judged on style and language, not theme or name.

Shlomi, whose late mother was a Holocaust survivor and father is Israeli born, described herself as "consciously Jewish." Though born in Utrecht, Holland, and a congregant at an Orthodox synagogue, Shlomi said it was not a stretch for her to apply for a prize that promotes Berber and Moroccan culture.

"I feel close to other Mediterranean cultures because they remind me of my own," she said.

"My Dream is Dead" was born from Shlomi's internal debates about the dream and reality of Israel, where she has many relatives.

"It is about searching for a home, a purpose, for the real Israel," she said. "But those are things I see in it, and I want to leave it open for other people."

Shlomi called the recognition of the award "quite amazing," adding that "I hope there is a publisher who will read this somewhere and will think, 'I want to publish this girl!'"