

**2002 Sydney Taylor Award Winner for Younger Readers**  
***Chicken Soup by Heart***  
**By Esther Hershenhorn; Illustrated by Rosanne Litzinger**

**Libby White**, Chair, Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee: This years AJL Convention theme is “A Legacy of Learning.” We hear much about Jewish legacy, more accurately, legacies. Legacy or legacies are not passive gifts. Legacies are fertile, living, breathing resources.

Just as the AJL celebrates legacies, the Sydney Taylor Book Award celebrates its own history. Just as scientists speak of building their work on the shoulders of their predecessors, and writers say that they have learned to write by reading widely, the award winners whom we recognize this evening are the spiritual children of those who enriched Jewish children’s literature in the past. Other men and women, just beginning their careers, will soon recognize the debt they owe to those we honor.

Esther Hershenhorn is the author of CHICKEN SOUP BY HEART, the 2002 winner for Younger Readers. Esther is a native of Philadelphia and a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania where she studied journalism. Esther moved to Chicago in the late 60’s where she taught in the city and suburban elementary and middle schools. Currently, in addition to producing prize-winning books, Esther teaches writing to students of all ages. What is obvious to me, even from my limited contacts with Esther via email, telephone, and letter, is the attitude of warmth and interest which she brings to every encounter. Esther coaches aspiring children’s book writers and leads family and parent-teacher workshops. She teaches at Chicago’s Newberry Library, at the University of Chicago’s Writers’ Studio, and at Ragdale, an artists’ residence program in Lake Forest, Illinois. She is also a poet, an author of stories that appear on the web, and a creator of educational software. On the state level, Esther is involved with the Illinois Young Writers Program. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators. Esther, we congratulate you!

**Esther Hershenhorn:** I creatively visualized countless Kodak Moments while out and about on my writer’s journey. I never dared to imagine this one. Or, for a matter of fact, the one in early January in the middle of my Thursday in the middle of my writing when I stopped to check my e-mail. There, in the middle, sat a message from Libby white. I should give her a call, she wrote. “I need to be in touch with you concerning CHICKEN SOUP BY HEART.” Who? I thought. Why? I asked. But I gave her a call anyway. “You and Rosanne Litzinger won the Sydney Taylor Book Award for Younger Readers!” Libby sang out. “Congratulations!” I pinched myself then. I’m pinching myself now.

A committee of the Association of Jewish Libraries deemed CHICKEN SOUP BY HEART “an outstanding book of Jewish content.” I’m a nice Jewish girl from West Philadelphia who longed to grow up to write children’s books one day. This award links my name with Sydney Taylor’s , with her award-winning work and with her memory. I read Sydney Taylor’s books throughout my childhood. I shared her stories with my

Chicago fifth graders. The Sydney Taylor Book Award guarantees a readership of children—especially Jewish children—and a placement in libraries—especially Jewish libraries. Finally, my book’s dedication names my Philadelphia Family—including my parents—Vivian and Samuel Chairnoff. Their names will live on now so others may know of them.

Many hands and hearts touched this beautiful book to help it reach the hands and hearts of readers. The acquiring Simon & Schuster editor in 1998, Stephanie Owens Lurie, loved this story as much as I did. Her careful editing insured that the three stories that Rudie stirs into his chicken soup underscore the bigger story—that of friendship. In the first story, Mrs Gittel, the babysitter, does something for Rudie. In the second story, Rudie does something for Mrs. Gittel. In the third story, the two of them do something for each other

A matchmaker of Yenta-like talents, Stephanie selected Rosanne Litzinger to bring my characters to life. Rosanne’s use of water colors, gouache and pencils in the warmest of colors prompted one reviewer to remark, “Love and care radiate from every page.” And who could not pinch Rudie Dinkins’ cheeks? If only Rosanne were here to claim and share this honor. Jessica Schultes supervised the mechanical stages of the book’s production, making sure the words and the art told the story seamlessly. And all at Simon & Schuster worked to find my book a home, in schools, and in libraries, in the marketplace, in the world.

Not once in my telling did I use the word “Jewish.” Yet the Library of Congress classified the book “Fiction-Jews.” I shouldn’t have been surprised: a 1995 Chicago JUF News article—“The Great Chicken Soup Debate”—was my story-dash-soup starter. The author sought the ingredients for the World’s Best Chicken Soup. I simmered that story idea for months, stirring and skimming, seasoning and salting, spooning bowls and slurping while I read about chicken soup. All the while I listened to Klezmer music. I was looking for that one song that sounded like my story. The Klezmer Conservatory Band served up the winner: their version of the riddle song “Tum Balalayka.” What can cry and shed no tears? The riddler asks. “A harts,” came the reply, “A harts.” In its final reduction, CHICKEN SOUP BY HEART belonged to Rudie and Mrs. Gittel, two very nice people who happened to be friends. They did for each other, the way that Ellie, Charlotte, Hennie, Sarah and Gertie did for each other, and others. In Sydney Taylor’s ALL-OF-A-KIND FAMILY books, uptown, downtown and all around New York. Love, it turns out, is a necessary ingredient. It is a universal staple with a never-ending shelf-life.

I offer sincere thanks: first to the members of the Sydney Taylor Book Award Committee—you’re regular geniuses; second to the Association of Jewish Libraries for feting me so memorably—they should bottle you like medicine; and finally, to Libby White, who guided my unbounded earnestness and enthusiasm through e-mails and letters. I’d like to think, we’re some very good friends now. My heart bursts. You’ve given me such a nice story to stir into my chicken soup.

**Libby White:** Roseanne Litzinger shares the 2002 Sydney Taylor Book Award for Younger Readers as illustrator of CHICKEN SOUP BY HEART. As Esther mentioned, Roseanne was unable to join us at convention. We congratulate her on her achievement.