

Fanny Goldstein Award Acceptance Speech
Heidi Rabinowitz

Heidi Rabinowitz has served AJL as chair of the Sydney Taylor Book Award committee, the PR committee, and as President of the organization. She directs the Feldman Children's Library at Congregation B'nai Israel of Boca Raton, FL, a large Reform synagogue. Heidi hosts The Book of Life podcast, an online show about Jewish books, music, film and web at bookoflifepodcast.com.

The last time I stood up here to talk about the Fanny Goldstein Award, I was introducing my BFF Etta Gold, who was the winner in 2011. Today our roles are reversed and Etta is introducing me!

This year in Charleston is my 18th AJL conference, so l'chaim!

My first was in 1999 in Boca Raton. I owe thanks to Lee Wixman, may he rest in peace, for walking uninvited into my library and demanding that I help plan, what was known at that time, as Convention. That's what turned me into an AJL fangirl.

It's AJL that gave me the confidence to turn from public librarianship to Judaica librarianship. I found mentors, I found moral support, I found collegiality and friendship. Coming to conventions and conferences and midwinter council meetings is always like returning to camp to meet up with my long distance buddies. I get to hang out with people who share my interests and understand my concerns, and who geek out over the same things I do. And as the lone librarian working mostly with preschoolers in a large synagogue, AJL gives me grownups to talk to.

AJL has immeasurably enriched my life and career, and the more I put in, the more I get out of it. Working on committees and serving on the board has taught me to think things through, to say what I mean, to put my best foot forward, and to play well with others. It's also taught me some circus tricks like keeping lots of plates spinning... and herding cats. All of these are useful skills in my daily life at the Feldman Children's Library at Congregation B'nai Israel! And they're not so bad in my personal life either!

There are lots of people to thank and I'm afraid I'll leave somebody out and make them feel bad so I'm not going to list everyone. But I have to say thank you to my Sydney Taylor Book Award family, who kept me on board way longer than they had to; to past/current/and future council members for making me feel a part of something important and for just generally being so dedicated; to everyone who's ever agreed to be interviewed for The Book of Life podcast; and I do have to single out Etta for being my conference roomie and fun traveling companion for nearly two decades.

My newest role in AJL is chair of the Member Relations committee, a position I pushed to create after reading Ron Wolfson's book, Relational Judaism. The book's introduction says "What really matters is that we care about the people we seek to engage. When we genuinely care about

people, we will not only welcome them; we will listen to their stories, we will share ours, and we will join together to build a Jewish community that enriches our lives." This is my experience of AJL: a warm and welcoming community rather than just a resource for professional information. So do me a favor: during the rest of this conference, come up to me and talk to me about how we can create that community of relationships OUTSIDE of conference time, over long distances and many time zones. Because as happy as I am to have won the Fanny Goldstein Award, I'm not done yet.

Thank you very much.

Oh, and don't forget to post your photos of books for the #JewishSummerReading challenge!