

## PJ PUBLISHING

# *It all began with a Jewish folktale from Algeria ...*

Creating opportunities for more Jewish families to find themselves in the pages of a book



A spread from **THE SABBATH LION**, by **Howard Schwartz and Barbara Rush**. Illustrated by **Stephen Fieser** pictured above

Most of the folktales that the PJ Library Book Selection Committee reviews originate in Eastern Europe, or less often, the Middle East. A North African folktale is rare, and this one was retold by award-winning folklorist and author, Howard Schwartz, and acclaimed author, Barbara Rush. The illustrations by Stephen Fieser were exquisite and deeply evocative of North Africa.

After much review, members of the PJ Library Book Selection Committee

decided they wanted to send *The Sabbath Lion* to PJ Library subscribers, but much to their dismay, they immediately ran into a stumbling block: first published in 1992, the book was long out of print, and the originating publisher did not want to bring it back into print. Not only this, but the book files were missing.

Unwilling to let go of *The Sabbath Lion* so quickly, PJ Library decided to take it on themselves. As luck would have it, Stephen Fieser discovered that he had Kodachrome slides of the original artwork, which were then scanned and sent to a designer to recreate the book files. Today, 22,175 PJ Library subscribers have received this beautiful book that tells the story of a young boy named Yosef who is determined to keep the

Sabbath as he makes a dangerous trek across the desert to Cairo and back. Alone, with night quickly approaching, the Sabbath Queen sends a powerful lion to guard Yosef and accompany him on his journey.

The successful outcome of *The Sabbath Lion* showed that creating books in-house is an optimal way to add desired books to the PJ Library line-up. And so was born PJ Publishing.

Next came *Fridays Are Special* and *Antlers with Candles*, rhyming books from the point of view of a little boy who tells of his family celebrating Shabbat and Hanukkah. The author wanted the family to be interracial, something that is not seen enough in children's books generally and almost never

A spread from **FRIDAYS ARE SPECIAL**,  
by Chris Barash. Illustrated by  
Melissa Iwai pictured below



seen in Jewish children's books. After receiving *Fridays Are Special*, one father wrote: "It was incredible to open the book to read to our child and see that it perfectly reflected our interracial and interfaith marriage. My lovely wife actually broke down and cried with joy when she read through the book and saw our family sitting at the Shabbat table."

The Book Selection Committee often has difficulty finding books for the youngest subscribers, so PJ Publishing began creating board books. Recent publications include family favorites such as *Todah* and *Planting Parsley*. *Todah* is about babies who give thanks for everything from "the wonders of a brand new day" to books that make them "point and giggle." *Planting Parsley* inspired PJ Library to mail parsley seeds

to all families to plant on Tu B'Shevat in anticipation of the Passover Seder.

With 12 books in various stages of completion, PJ Publishing's output is small in comparison to the number of titles purchased from trade publishers. The intention is to maintain a balance, but PJ Publishing does give PJ Library another creative venue through which to produce more of the high-quality Jewish children's books that we want to distribute to subscribers. And while content is always core, books created by PJ Publishing have additional benefits, such as the ability to use the books in translation, so that children being raised in Jewish homes across the globe can read the same books whether in English, Spanish or Russian.

**PJ Library sources books from multiple publishers—45 and counting!**

**PJ LIBRARY'S TOP PUBLISHERS**  
(in order of total title count and distribution)

1. Lerner Publishing Group (Kar-Ben)
2. Penguin Random House
3. Macmillan
4. Scholastic
5. Simon & Schuster
6. Albert Whitman & Company
7. HarperCollins
8. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt
9. Holiday House
10. Candlewick Press