



WHAT ZEESIE SAW ON DELANCEY STREET

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In the early 1900's on the Lower East Side, a seven-year-old girl learns lessons of community, generosity, and courage from the Jewish immigrant population.

“**B**ehind that door is a special room. We call it ‘the money room.’ There, if a man has money to give, he leaves it. If he needs money, he takes it, but only as much as he needs...”

Zeesie’s father explained to his daughter one form of a longstanding and dearly held practice of the Jewish people: providing for those in need. Acts of *zedakah* (righteous giving) are an obligation we bear toward others. In the Talmud (rabbinic laws compiled from about 200 B.C.E. to 500 C.E.), various levels of giving are named. One of the highest levels dictates that neither the giver nor receiver know the identity of the other, thus preserving the dignity of the recipient. The sages of old recognized that we benefit from both giving and receiving, depending on our circumstances at a given time. Consider ways for children to take part in such deeds. Explain to them that in helping others, it is sometimes best to remain anonymous; explore ways in which you might accomplish this, then—act!

THE SOUND OF KLEZMER

The music at the party Zeesie and her family attended is known as *klezmer*. *Klezmer*’s unique sound is derived in part from the instruments it common includes: violins, accordians, clarinets, pianos, trombones, and trumpets. The repertoire consists largely of dance songs for weddings and celebrations, though some pieces are sad or mournful. Song titles and lyrics are generally in Yiddish. Because the music can be fast-paced and varied, it often appeals to children. *Klezmer* music can easily be found at a local

music store or public library. Play some *klezmer* tunes in your home: you may end up dancing as they did on Delancey Street!

IMMIGRATION TO NEWYORK

Thousands of Jewish families left their homeland during the 19th and 20th centuries and came to the United States seeking refuge. These pioneers came to a place and culture completely foreign to them. To assimilate, many needed groups such as the *lantsleit* organization referred to in this book, which was dedicated to assisting people wishing to make a new start. Happily for most resettled Jews, including those who emigrate today, the United States offers tremendous opportunity for a better life.

THE YIDDISH LANGUAGE

Yiddish began as a primarily spoken language around the 10th century C.E. and spread throughout Eastern and Central Europe. At one time, Yiddish was the primary language of Ashkenazi Jews (those of Eastern and Central European descent). Referred to by many as the *mameloschen* (mother tongue), it is estimated that Yiddish was once understood by approximately 11 million of the world’s 18 million Jews. In New York, Yiddish-speaking Jews of the 19th and early 20th centuries developed a font of Yiddish literature, music and theater. Though estimates say fewer than 250,000 people in the U.S. speak Yiddish today, the language is experiencing resurgence and is being taught at an increasing number of colleges and universities. Pj