



# MY GRANDFATHER'S COAT

Written by Jim Aylesworth

Illustrated by Barbara McClintock

*Grandfather made himself a coat when he came to America – and now it's wearing out. What do you think he'll do? (Hint: He doesn't throw it out!)*

## JEWISH CONCEPTS

Folktales are powerful tools for passing customs, traditions, and values *l'dor vador*, from one generation to another. *My Grandfather's Coat* is one of a number of versions of a beloved story and Yiddish song, “I Had a Little Overcoat.” Why are there so many variations of this (and many other) folktales? As Jewish families left their homes in various *shtetls* (villages) of the Old Country, they took their stories with them, and the stories changed over time in countless tellings and retellings.

In this tale, the storyteller's grandfather arrives in a new land “with little more than nothing at all.” He comes looking to make a better life for himself and brings with him Jewish and secular values. Many Jewish communities throughout the world are made up of immigrants and descendants of immigrants from many countries. The influences of various foods, music, and traditions make the fabric of the Jewish people both beautiful and fascinating.

The grandfather in this story, clearly ahead of his time, reuses and recycles his coat, again and again. By necessity, many immigrants were frugal. The value of *ba'al tashchit*, literally “do not destroy”, is a core Jewish tenet that teaches the importance of not being wasteful. This imperative dates back as far as the Torah (first five books of the Bible), and is as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago.

## USING THIS BOOK AT HOME

If you have access to other versions of this story, including Phoebe Gilman's *Something from Nothing* or Joseph Had a Little Overcoat by Simms Taback, compare and contrast different versions of this folktale. In two columns, you and your child can list or draw what's the same and what's different in them.

Grandfather passes down something very special to his great grandson. What heirlooms are in your family? Encourage your child to ask grandparents, other relatives, or special friends about cherished belongings from their childhood. What stories go with these prized possessions?

Have fun with recycling! Practice *ba'al tashchit*:

- Are there socks that have a hole (or two), but could be made into a hand puppet?
- Can an outgrown t-shirt, maybe even one that's tattered, be cut down into a night shirt for a teddy bear or doll?
- What items, no longer of interest to your children, can be donated to a local family shelter? Remember to honor the dignity of recipients by only giving away items that are in excellent condition.