

High School Senior Pens A Breakthrough Comic Book

By Henry M. Holden

Millburn High School senior Julie Averbach wrote, edited, and published "Adventures From My World," the first of its kind comic book to support siblings of individuals with special needs.

"I was inspired by a family experience, and my volunteering in the special needs community that made me more sensitive to their needs," said Averbach. "I noticed a lack of innovative resources to support the siblings of special needs children. Through my involvement with the special needs community, I met a lot of families and I realized that the parents are so focused on providing all the resources to help the special needs child to succeed, that they sometimes overlook the emotional needs of the other children."

The book began as an English assignment.

"The reason I choose the comic book format is because of an English assignment I had in the ninth grade," he explains. "I had to read Marjane Satrapi's

"Persepolis," a graphic novel that captured a young girl's perspective on the Iranian Revolution. As part of my English class we had to write our own comic book story. The first story in my book, and my favorite, is the story I wrote for my English assignment.

"When we think of comic books we think of superheroes and some form of entertainment, and not necessarily therapy or social activism," said Averbach. "This assignment showed me that comic books can be used for social activism."

The book earned Averbach the Girl Scout Gold Award.

"I officially finished my project last June 2016 at the Girl Scout ceremony where I received my Gold Award," the highest honor that a Girl Scout can achieve. It involves planning and executing a creative community service initiative that will have a sustainable impact.

"It took me two months to write the other five stories. Since I'm involved with special needs fam-

ilies I drew inspiration from them, and the special needs siblings I interacted with."

The stories, in the book, are from her personal observations and capture both the damaging and the constructive, like fear, anger, worry, resentment, as well as the maturity, empathy, and sympathy parts of the special needs sibling experience.

"After writing and creating basic sketches for these stories I decided the book needed artwork to illustrate it," she says. "I then collaborated with three art students from the Kubert School, which specializes in cartooning and graphic art, to illustrate the story. That took several months, and then there was an extensive editing process."

Averbach cautiously printed 200 copies, just to get some feedback before she printed the final version. "After I got some feedback I made some minor tweaks and then printed 8,000 copies overseas."

"In one way or another I'm still been working on the book. I have given



away or sold about 5,000 copies, I would estimate. I have been thinking of printing more since this

year I'm going to a Girl Scout convention where there are usually several thousand Girl Scouts."

The book has taken on a life of its own.

"Although I have been *continued on page 5*



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Breakthrough Comic Book...

continued from page 4

visiting support groups," said Averbach. "I have seen my book going beyond where I thought it would go. I'm getting much wider circulation than I would've thought because I'll give the book to somebody, they'll read it, and then pass it on to their family or friends."

Averbach gets little feedback.

"Occasionally, I'll hear from somebody in Texas or California who somehow got the comic book. I can see it is traveling well beyond my physical reach, and exceeded all my expectations."

"My hope is to make this project sustainable. I encourage mental health

professionals, and others, to write their own comic books about issues like terminal illness, divorce, or different topics, because I think the comic book media has a lot of untapped potential.

"For example, right now I am mentoring a Girl Scout in California. She is working on her own Gold Award and she's writing comic book about bipolar disorder, which her father has."

In the fall Averbach plans to attend Yale University.

"I'm looking forward to attending Yale University," she says. "In terms of a major I'm not sure what I want to study. I do know I want to continue

to explore the power of art as I have started to do with my comic books. I am very interested in emotional intelligence and doing this project really helped me identify that interest."

"One of the main reasons I chose Yale is they have a center for emotional intelligence so I'm hoping to continue to explore how comic books can be used to teach children with special needs to express their emotions more openly."

The concept of emotional intelligence is relatively new, and introduced by Daniel Goleman in the mid-1990s.

"Over the past 20 years it's been a lot of research to support emotional intelligence, and skills such as

empathy, and motivation, the ability to regulate your own emotions and having social aptitude," says Averbach. "Personally, I'm very interested in this field."

Averbach has decided to donate her proceeds from her book.

"I basically give the comic books to hospitals and support groups. If I do sell any on my website it's either for the not-for-profit price of a dollar which is at cost, or I'm selling them for three dollars with any profits from those sales go to repay the printing costs."

"I feel my reward is coming to me directly with the siblings I know who have come to express their emotions more openly."

Local Rabbi To Probe Chassidism In Whippany Library Series

Rabbi Shalom Lubin, spiritual leader of Congregation Shaya Ahavat Torah in Parsippany, and director of Chabad of Southeast Morris County in Madison, will offer a fascinating look at "Chassidism: History, Philosophy, and Contemporary Life" June 13 and June 20.

The free series is sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women's West Morris Section and coordinated by the organization's Our Jewish World program. It began on June 6. The series will be held at noon in the Morris County Library, Whippany.

"This course will explore the origins of the Chassidic movement and its core principles and mystical teachings," said Lubin. "It will

also share a glimpse into the lives of the great Chassidic personalities, and discuss the impact of the movement in modern times."

The workshop leader is the founder of the New Jersey Jewish Law Symposium, an annual event highlighting the synthesis and integration of the Talmud, the Jewish Legal System, and U.S. civil law.

Born and raised in Chicago, Lubin began his relationship with the Jewish community in N.J. in 1996, while he was studying at the Rabbinical College of America in Morristown. Before settling in N.J., his rabbinic training took him around the world, including to Sydney, Australia; Bellevue, Washington; and Minsk, Belarus.