

A holiday to remember—finally!



Marla Feinstein, the only Jewish kid in her fourth-grade class, knows what December will be like. While everyone else is decorating trees and hanging stockings, she'll be forgetting to light the candles and staring at a big plastic dreidel. The holidays couldn't get much worse. So Marla decides to find out what Hanukkah's *really* about—and soon she's got her family turning latkes into Hanukkah Performance Art and doing a wild hora. She's made the Festival of Lights the biggest party in town!

“A gem of a story.”

—*Booklist*



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Dreidel, dreidel, I made it out of . . . what?

I looked at the hollow, green, plastic dreidel that Bubbi had sent to us. The gold foil candy coins that came inside it were long gone. We had gobbled them up the second the dreidel had come in the mail.

“It doesn’t spin,” I said.

“Well, they are supposed to be made of clay,” my mom said, “or wood or something.”

When I asked her how to play, she said, “It’s gambling, for chocolate gelt. ‘Gelt’ is money. One of these Hebrew letters on it is a gimel, as in ‘gimme a gimel and some gelt.’”

“You don’t have a clue how to play, do you?” I asked her. “Not a clue,” she agreed. “But we can make up a game.”

I did not want to make up a game. Here we were not able to have Christmas lights because being Jewish was so very important and we didn’t do the hora and my mom didn’t even know which letter was the GIMEL!

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HOW I SAVED HANUKKAH



Amy Goldman Koss
pictures by Diane deGroat

PUFFIN BOOKS

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Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Putnam Books for Young Readers,
345 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.
Penguin Books Ltd, 27 Wrights Lane, London W85TZ, England
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2
Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England

First published in the United States of America by Dial Books for Young Readers,
a member of Penguin Putnam Inc., 1998

Published by Puffin Books,
a division of Penguin Putnam Books for Young Readers, 2000

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS HAS CATALOGED THE DIAL EDITION AS FOLLOWS:

Koss, Amy Goldman, date.

How I saved Hanukkah / Amy Goldman Koss, pictures by Diane deGroat.
p. cm.

Summary: Marla, the only Jewish student in her fourth-grade class, wishes she celebrated Christmas like her best friend, Lucy, until one year when she decides to learn all about Hanukkah and to teach her family about it, too.

[1. Hanukkah—Fiction. 2. Jews—United States—Fiction.
3. Family life—California—Fiction. 4. California—Fiction.]
I. deGroat, Diane, ill. II. Title.

PZ7K852Han 1998 [Fic]—DC21 96-52715 CIP AC

Puffin Books ISBN 9780141309828
Special Markets ISBN 9780451479884

Printed in the United States of America

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*Thanks to Sandy Medof, Sue Horton,
Jim White, and Cindy Kane.*

Kisses to: Momba, Poppa Bear, Emily, Bennett,
and my Freen. Happy Hanukkah! A.G.K.



C H A P T E R

.....1.....

“**W**e shouldn’t have to come to school when there’s a sub,” my best friend, Lucy, was saying. “When the teacher stays home, we should too.”

I nodded and said, “I was just thinking that the last few days of school before the holiday recess are such a waste, they should just cancel them. We’d start vacation the week before. But then *that* week would be the last week before vacation so *it* would be useless, and might as well be canceled.”

“We could cancel backward all the way to the first day of school,” Lucy said. “And since we know the first day is worthless, we might as well skip it too. Right?”

That’s why Lucy Doyle is my best friend. Not only does she understand me, she also agrees with me.

“By my calculations,” I said, “that comes out to no school ever. I like it.”

“Me too.”

The substitute teacher said, “Hush, girls. You two, in the back! I don’t want to have to speak to you again!”

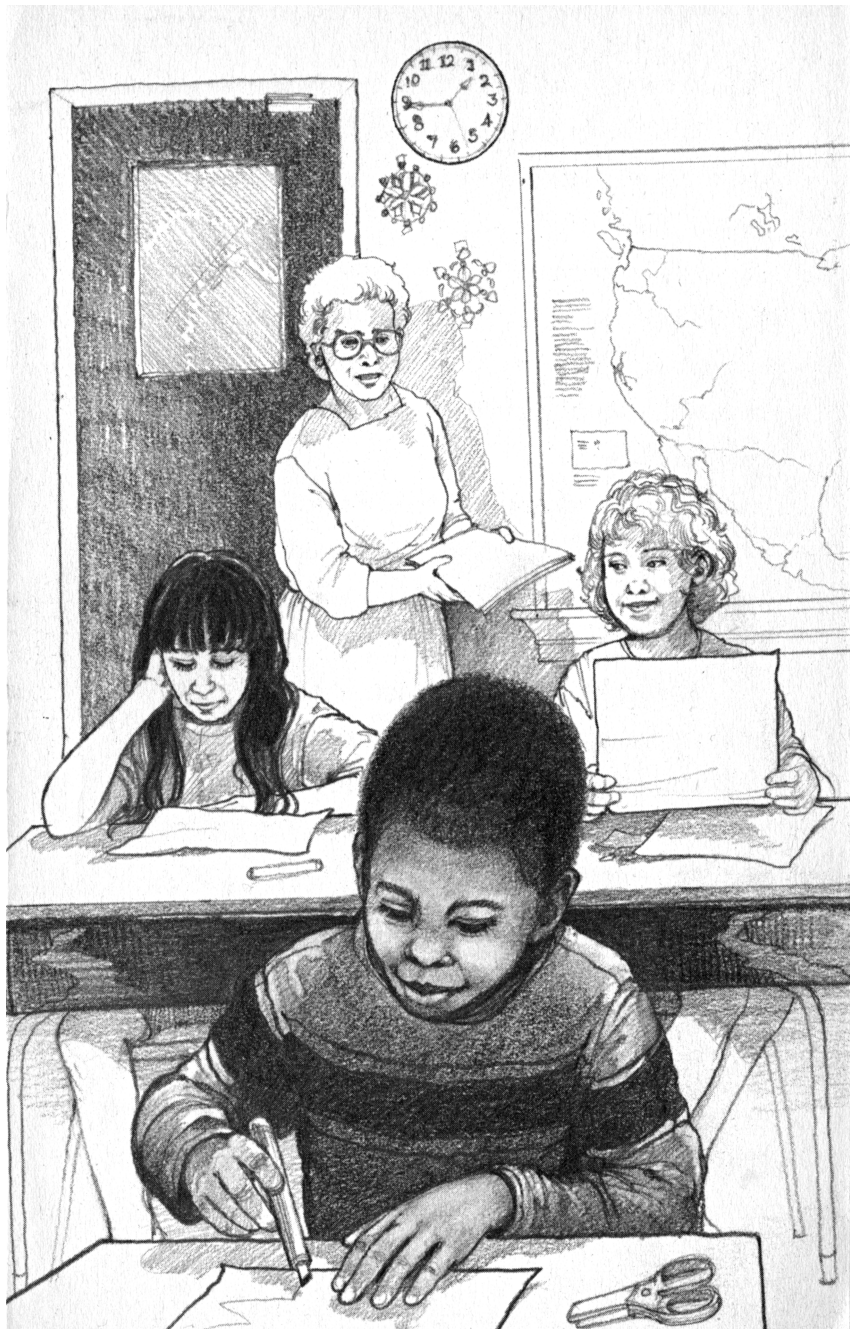
It would have been entirely fine with me if she didn’t speak to us again, but next thing I knew, she was calling my name.

“Will Marla Feinstein please raise her hand?” she said. So I did.

“Oh, it’s you.” As she walked toward me, she told the class, “Mrs. Guyer thought you might like to make Christmas—I mean, *holiday*—decorations. Won’t that be fun?”

Teachers always give us dumb stuff to do before vacation and call it “fun.” It’s because they’re so, so sick of us, they start to get desperate. Our regular teacher, Mrs. Guyer, was the one who was having fun—she’d taken the day off.

“Someone should tell the sub we’re in fourth grade, not kindergarten,” Lucy whispered. Her breath tickled my ear, making me giggle. But when the sub put a piece of blue paper and a piece of white paper on my desk, my giggles quit. I glanced down at the Hanukkah colors and watched the sub hand out red and green paper to everyone else. My cheeks got hot.



Mrs. Guyer must have left a note for the sub saying there was one Jew in the class and I was it. A few days ago, before she abandoned us to this sub, Mrs. Guyer had me make a blue-and-white candle when the rest of the class made red-and-green ones. She talked about how everyone is different and that's what makes the world interesting. But everyone isn't different—just ME.

I wished myself out the window, on the playground, across the patchy lawn, on my Rollerblades, and zip-ping downhill, getting smaller in the distance—a tiny speck.

Then I heard Lucy's voice, loud and clear. "No fair!" she said. "I want the colors Marla got!"

The substitute's little lizard eyes flicked from side to side. "Oh!" she said. "Are you Jewish?"

"Totally," lied Lucy.

The sub squinted at Lucy's blond curls and turned-up Irish nose. Then she sighed and gave her blue and white paper too. Lucy made goofy faces behind the sub's back until I smiled.

I decided to make a white sailboat on a wide blue sea. But that was too hard, so I rolled my blue and white paper into a tube. I told Lucy that my brother

could use it as a sword. Everything is a sword or a gun to him anyway.

Lucy, who is a great artist, cut her white paper into animal-shaped clouds and glued them to a blue sky. The whole blue-and-white business was way less icky since Lucy was working with Hanukkah colors too—but I was still glad to hear the bell ring.

My blue-and-white “decoration” was stuffed in my backpack. Lucy was waving hers around like a flag as we walked home from school. She sang, “Glory, glory hallelujah, teacher hit me with a ruler!” Then she poked me. “Hey, Marla, what’s wrong with you?”

I wanted to sing. It was Friday. A weekend! And then only two more days of school until vacation! But I still felt a little creepy.

I pulled a lemon off of a neighbor’s tree. “Catch!” I called—and Lucy did. We played catch while we walked, all the way to where I turn left and Lucy turns right.

My little brother, Ned, came charging out the front door, straight for me. He’s always deliriously happy to

see me after school. My mom says that's why I don't need a dog.

"Guess who came to school?" Ned said, grabbing at the ends of my long hair. "Guess!"

"Santa Claus," I said.

First Ned's face caved in, disappointed that I had guessed. Then he looked at me with awe, because I was so brilliant.

"I went to the same preschool, Neddy. Santa comes every year," I said.

"Oh." Ned thought about that, then perked up. "Guess what he gave me!"

I did not say, "A candy cane." That would have been mean.

"A CANDY CANE!" Ned said. He fished around in his grimy pocket with his grubby hand and pulled out a half-eaten, entirely slimed, candy cane. "Want some?" he offered.

A fabulous sister might have pretended to take a lick and made extravagant yum-yum sounds. Instead I reached into my backpack and pulled out my blue-and-white tube sword.

"Happy Hanukkah," I said. "Ho ho ho." No one on

earth would be excited by that crumpled scrap—except Ned. It must be nice to be three.

Ned jumped around, jabbing me with his wrinkled sword while I put on my Rollerblades. It occurred to me that he moved more like a tree frog than like any kind of mammal. I told him I'd be back before dinner, but still he watched me leave as if I was going off to war, on the moon.

Rollerblading is the best feeling in the world. It is like sliding on a really smooth wood floor in socks, except better, because you go and go and you're outside. My arms love it, my face loves it, even my hair loves it. And it's hilly in California where I live, with lots of glorious downhills to fly.

I'd had a great pre-dinner ride and was racing back home in the near-dark when Christmas lights started coming on at every house but ours. Lucy likes the pure white lights best, but I think the all-different-colored ones are perfect.

When I asked why we can't have Christmas lights, my mom said, "Because we're Jewish."

"What's that got to do with it?" I'd asked. "They

don't make you prove you're Christian at the store when you try to buy lights."

As I zipped toward home, I thought about the Christmas lights. They reminded me again about being singled out at school. Here it was the first night of Hanukkah, but you'd never know it was anything special looking at my house. As I got closer, I saw how boring and sad it looked—the plain, dull frump at a ball full of dazzling princesses. I knew exactly how it must feel.