

# A HAPPY AND HEALTHY HOLIDAY!

From

Steven, Caryll, John and Nathan Greene



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## Breathing new life into a 'Shofar' tale

Wayland author's Jewish stories

By Dawn A. Swann

Special to the Advocate

The tale of Barcelona's secret shofar may have arrived in America via a rabbi's listserv, speculates Wayland author Jacqueline Dembar Greene. However it came, the legend of Don Fernando Aguilar, the conductor of the Royal Symphony of Barcelona, has spread from congregation to congregation.

As the story goes, Don Fernando lived in the time of the Spanish Inquisition – when he and other Jews had to hide their faith or face death. So determined was Don Fernando to bring the shofar to the secret Jews, that he worked it into a symphony performance on the eve of Rosh Hashanah – even as the enforcers of the Inquisition sat in attendance.

Greene has weaved the old yarn into a children's book, "The Secret Shofar of Barcelona." It is the seventh book she has had published this year; the others are about a fictional Russian Jewish immigrant featured in the American Girl series.

Raised during the '50s in Bloomfield, Conn., Greene attended a large Sephardic congregation that included many members of her mother's extended family. She's not quite sure where they all were born. Sometimes her grandmother would say she was from Greece, other times she said Turkey – it all depended on the story she was telling. The elders spoke Ladino, an amalgamation of Spanish and Hebrew, with Arabic, Turkish, French and Greek tossed in.

Her imagination enlivened by her family's laissez-faire attitude toward their history and her facility for language nurtured by their myriad dialects, Greene majored in French literature in college.

She's not quite sure what launched her writing career. It may have been her search for a children's Hanukah book that she could read aloud to her son's classroom without feeling as if she were preaching the story of the Maccabees.

Unable to find one, she wrote her own and published it herself in 1980. It is about a boy named Nathan who swallowed a tooth on Hanukah. Nathan lamented his lost tooth-fairy opportunity until his grandfather told him about the tradition of Hanukah gelt – which turned out to be far more lucrative than a visit from a fairy.

Alternatively, Greene says, she may owe her career to the



Jacqueline Dembar Greene. See page 18 for a review of the "Secret Shofar."

### From the 'Secret Shofar':

Rafael had an idea. "Since it is Rosh Hashanah, you could add the call of the shofar to the native instruments."

Don Fernando's shoulders slumped. "So many of Barcelona's Jews have longed to hear it. But who would take such a risk?"

"I will," Rafael said. "If you are brave enough to conduct a Rosh Hashanah concert in front of the Duke and the Inquisition, then I will play the shofar." He gave his father a sly smile. "Maybe it's safest to hide the shofar in plain sight."

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children's literature professor at the University of Connecticut. Intrigued by the old Yankee folk tale of Tom Cooke, New England's own Robin Hood, Greene wrote a short story and sent it back to her alma mater in hopes of receiving some useful feedback. She got some.

"She told me, 'I'm going to tell you something you don't want to hear. You're wasting your time. This story should be a novel, and you are just afraid to do it.' She told me I needed to stop everything and write. So I did," said Greene.

"The Leveler," in young adult novel format, went on to become a Pick of the List for *Booklist*, the American Library Association's review journal.

Real people don't live in Greene's stories, but they do drop by – such as the way "The Hanukah Tooth" was inspired by one of her two sons. "What His Father Did" grew out of a joke her father told her. Refused a meal by an innkeeper, a vagabond warns: "I hope I won't have to do what my father did." In response, the innkeeper scrambles to prepare a meal.

When Greene first read the book to a room full of kinder-