

NEW YORK STREET GAMES AND OTHER STORIES AND SKETCHES. By Meyer Liben. Schocken, 1985. 275 pp. \$17.95.

"You're it," cried Teddy Horton, the eight-year-old child of the host and hostess, and he tagged Danny Levy, son of one of the visiting couples." So begins a typical tale in Meyer Liben's collection *New York Street Games and Other Stories and Sketches*. The author continues: "The four [other boys] fled from Danny as though he were the carrier of a plague, one whose touch meant danger, desecration, humiliation; they fled from Danny to avoid the touch that transmitted the nameless horror." Six adults, seated on the porch, discuss the meaning of the game, as the children hide and dart about. And for Liben, the game *itself* is as significant, if not more so, than the comments of the onlookers, and great care is taken to describe it in full detail. For as Liben states in "An Essay": "Circumstances change, and these games, for they answer to universal needs, will go on in one place or another. They will live . . . and will be [a pleasure to recall] for some future chronicler who will look into these games and see the beginnings of individual struggle, the cruelties and fulfillments of socialized life, the beginnings of the community."

Not that Meyer Liben — intellectual that he was — saturated his stories with doses of heavy-handed social commentary. He was too much the artist for that. Liben seems to have been genuinely obsessed with games and took obvious delight in recording them and the time and place in which they occurred with as much accuracy as possible. And if they just happened to reveal some larger truth, why so be it!

In "Lady, I Did It," a group of small boys tests, as Liben puts it, the Reality Principle. "We approached a ground-floor apartment in a house up the block and one of us rang the bell. There was the sound of footsteps, and a woman opened the door, looked out at us. 'Lady, I Did It;' and we ran off." Closer to a sketch than a story, the piece runs for four and a half pages, and is utterly charming.

"Hop, Skip, And Jump" finds the

young hero, David Flaxman, preparing himself for Bar Mitzvah, with Reb Rutnick's assistance; and with his kid brother Daniel's help — whose job was to warn of approaching cars — he was preparing for the hop, skip, and jump event in some future Olympics. Watching the boy, Reb Rutnick thinks, "Why, if he applied himself with half the energy to his studies, he could become a Talmudist, a Gaon." But these are the streets of New York — the New World — and Davey is busy practicing for an entirely different sort of life.

"King of the Hill" has the boys fighting for the top. And in "The Record," Yelly goes for the block record of 58 consecutive baskets in the neighborhood playground.

In "Homage to Benny Leonard," Davey emulates his hero, the great Jewish boxing champ, Benny Leonard. "Stories he had heard at home of the Old World pogroms and persecutions had created an uncertainty, a fear, which required a defender. This defender was required against no present foe but against some unknown future enemy, even against the monstrous foes of the past — Hanian, Antiochus Epiphanes, the thundering Black Hundreds.

"It was no accident that . . . he needed the prince-hero, the 135-pounder who could weave, parry, outguess his opponent, jab, feint, dance off, and yet throw the sudden knockout punch, and then come dancing into the middle of the ring, his dark hair unruffled, saying into the microphone: 'Hi, Mom, he never touched me.' "

And here Liben has scored a direct bull's-eye. The period details have the ring of absolute truth to them, carry the reader back to the streets of a bygone New York. Yet the story is also presented within the context of Jewish history, giving it a timeless depth. When Davey takes on an older boy, nicknamed The Gate, there are psychological insights aplenty and even some suspense — the latter, a rarity in these pages, for the author's interests lay elsewhere.

Meyer Liben died a decade ago. During his lifetime he published only one volume, *Justice Hunger*, containing a novel about his days at City College of

New York and some short stories. The rest of his work appeared in such literary journals as *American Review*, *Commentary*, *Midstream* and *New Directions Annual*. He was a businessman by trade — who, incidentally, despised business — but as George Dennison points out in a moving memoir, Liben wrote all the time. Much apparently went unpublished, and it took ten years for the current collection to get into print. Dennison places Liben squarely in the tradition of Chekhov, Gogol, Hawthorne, Hemingway, Paul Goodman — the author's close friend — and Ring Lardner. But Liben was a very quiet writer. There are no high-tension confrontations in his fiction, no life-and-death crises. His language was simple and unadorned. He excelled in anecdotal tales with social and psychological overtones. His childhood recollections are highly evocative, his other work sometimes less so.

In "Ball of Fire," the adult narrator is a passenger on an airplane. He tells us, "We were circling over the landing field and it was quite a beautiful sight." What exactly *was* beautiful is left for the reader to imagine. Some of the longer stories in this volume, found under the heading "Streets and Alleys," verge on the essayistic; their narrative lines are slight, and they will not be to everyone's taste. But there are plenty of gems here too, such as "Mr. Mintz Retires" and "The Pharmacist."

George Dennison put it best when he said: "The ongoing, comprehensive anthology of important American work that exists both in our affections and our judgment, would be radically incomplete without examples of the fiction of Meyer Liben."

Liben wrote with love, quiet humor, and a keen eye and intellect. This collection of his work, spanning thirty-five years, is a welcome one, indeed.

— Isidore Haiblum

PLAY BY PLAY. By Isaac Goldemberg. Translated by Hardie St. Martin. Persea Press, 1985. 172 pp. \$13.95.

Play by Play, a novel by Latin American writer Isaac Goldemberg, author of a well-received novel entitled *Frag-*

and who became the country's first prime minister. The Centennial will be an official and national event in Israel and will be celebrated in the United States and other countries.

NA'AMAT USA members are encouraged to create programs, hold events and join other organizations in paying tribute to this valiant leader who epitomized the aspirations of the Jewish people and lovers of freedom everywhere.



In March, the Women's Action Alliance celebrated the achievements of women's history and commemorated the first **Women's History Institute** for women leaders, conducted by the Alliance, Sarah Lawrence College and the Smithsonian Institution in 1979. From this Institute emerged the recommendation for a national observance of Women's History Month, which has since been implemented yearly. Throughout the United States in March, numerous women's groups, institutions and public facilities highlight the accomplishments of women, providing education and inspiration for all people.

Among the many women activists who spoke at the event in New York City were Carol Berkin, Associate Provost and Professor of History, Baruch College, and Dorothy Helly, Associate Professor of History and Coordinator of Women's Studies at Hunter College. Both pointed out the tremendous growth in Women's Studies in universities throughout the country in the last ten years, which has made women visible on the historical landscape. "Gender has become a tool of the historian," said Ms. Helly. Women's Studies also has generated new questions and opened up new areas of study and research in, for example, family history, single women and female sexuality.

Presentations by women leaders who were the participants in the Institute included Edythe Rosenfield, national vice president of NA'AMAT USA, who discussed how the Institute inspired and impelled her to introduce Women's History Month celebrations in her home state of Connecticut and to educate NA'AMAT USA members about the event. It also motivated her to initiate the organization's Oral History project. Also attending from NA'AMAT

A Letter From Masha Lubelsky

Dear Haverot,

During Pesach, the holiday of freedom and deliverance, our thoughts naturally turn to our brethren in the Soviet Union and in other lands where Jews are not free. We witnessed with great joy the arrival of Anatoly Shcharansky after so many years of imprisonment in the Soviet Union. We continue to strive and hope for the release of Ida Nudel and all the other refuseniks, so they may be united with their families and friends in Israel.

Na'amat has made progress in our activities for the advancement of the status of women in Israel, and stands in the forefront of all efforts to improve conditions for women at work, at home, in public life and in society in general.

We are experiencing budgetary difficulties in maintaining our vocational and agricultural school programs, due to serious curtailment of government participation. We are demanding that the government continue its support for these schools, which provide academic and vocational training for youngsters who are unable to cope with the regular high school system.

We are proud to note that among the recipients of this year's Namir Prize, awarded by the Histadrut to outstanding workers, was the director of one of our day nurseries in Carmiel. Award winner Sara Segev symbolizes all of the devoted and dedicated workers in our day nurseries caring for the children with skill and love.

On behalf of all the haverot of Na'amat in Israel, I am happy to extend best wishes to you and your families.

Secretary General, Na'amat

USA were Edith Margolis, national vice president, and Judith A. Sokoloff, editor, *Na'amat Woman*.

The Women's Action Alliance is a national organization committed to full equality for women. Its purpose is to develop educational programs and services that assist women and women's organizations to accomplish their goals.



Top-level professionals who work for the major American and Canadian Zionist organizations recently participated in the second annual **Zionist Professionals Conference** in Baltimore, Md., where they discussed common concerns and exchanged approaches to problem solving. Over 65 women and men from 20 organizations attended the two-day conference, held under the aegis of the American Zionist Federation and funded by the World Zionist Organization. Shoshonna Ebstein, national executive director of NA'AMAT USA, served as chairwoman of the steering committee, which planned and implemented the event.

Among the broad range of issues and topics addressed were: Becoming Better Professionals, Volunteer-Professional Relationships, Utilizing Computer Technology, Towards the 31st Zionist Congress, The History, Structure and Function of the World Zionist

Organization and the Jewish Agency, and Perceptions of North American Zionism.

Among the guest speakers were Bill Levine, director-general, WZO Department of Organization; Dr. Mildred Mailick, professor, Hunter School of Social Work; Dan Schueftan, professor, Harry S. Truman Institute of Hebrew University; Prof. Sidney Mailick, Graduate School of Public Administration, N.Y.U., and Dadie Perlov, executive director, National Council of Jewish Women.

NA'AMAT USA participants were Shoshonna Ebstein, executive director; Harriet Silverman, Organization and Membership director; Judi Dill, Eastern Area director; Estelle Perry, Public Relations director, and Gloria Schlossberg, executive director, Philadelphia Council. Pioneer Women/ Na'amat of Canada was represented by Rose Rosenblum of Montreal and Lorraine Levene of Toronto.

The conference, reported the enthusiastic participants, was an excellent opportunity for executive directors, field directors and program, education, public relations and membership professionals to meet their counterparts in a very productive and open environment consisting of workshops, lectures, discussions and informal gatherings. □