

36 LETTERS

One Family's Story

by Joan Sohn

Experience has taught me that when I encounter a paradox, it is usually an indication of something profound, some secret, being revealed. And this is surely the case regarding the extraordinary book, *36 Letters, One Family's Story*, by Joan Sohn.

What is the paradox of this remarkable, breathtakingly beautiful book? Simply that its narrow focus on one Jewish family ultimately results in revealing to its readers an intimate glimpse into Every Jewish Family. And, in fact, it transcends Jewish experience as well, in the same way that the Japanese critic in Tokyo could not understand the success of the theatrical *Fiddler on the Roof* because, as the critic wrote, "it is such a typically Japanese story."

The brilliant writer Cynthia Ozick offers this apt analogy: "If we blow into the narrow end of the shofar [ram's horn], we will be heard far. But if we choose to be 'Mankind' rather than Jewish, and blow into the wider part, we will not be heard at all; for us America will have been in vain." In *36 Letters, One Family's Story*, Joan Sohn, through her many talents and gifts, has taken the story of one Jewish family and transformed it into a powerful portrait of the immigrant Jewish experience itself, and the journey of European Jewry to America.

Joan Sohn is a talented writer who tells a great story. She is also a gifted teacher, who anticipates the details we would want to know. The design of the book, mixing text and illustrations so beautifully, is exquisite. You will not just enjoy and admire this book; you will love this book.

Most importantly, the 36 letters themselves are gripping. They will transport you to other times and places. And they will inspire you to feel connected to this one particular family in a deep, emotional, and uplifting way. The primal connection you will make with this family, with all families, is precisely the profound secret it reveals.

Bravo! This book is a gift!

—Arthur Kurzweil
author of *From Generation to Generation:
How to Trace Your Jewish Genealogy and Family History*,
and *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Genealogy*