

Uncle Eli lends touch of Seuss to Passover

By Jennifer Lomas
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Eli Segal retelling the Passover meal liturgy

Religious studies professor and department head **Eli** Segal has just published a new book. But unless you're nine, you probably won't appreciate the full richness of this runaway bestseller.

Segal's book, Uncle Eli's Special-For-Kids, Most Fun Ever, Under the Table Passover Haggadah, is a beautifully illustrated children's book written in the rhyming style of Dr. Seuss. It retells the Passover meal liturgy and comes complete with an easy-to-understand glossary of terms that helps readers grasp many of the Jewish traditions behind the holiday.

Since its publication in February, it has almost completely sold out of its first print run of 12,000 copies.

Major booksellers such as Chapters and online giant Amazon Books can't even keep the book in stock. Both retailers are reported to have backorder lists of readers eager to get their hands on a copy.

However, Segal is modest when questioned about his surprise bestseller.

"I started this book 19 years ago when my oldest child was a toddler. At the time, the whole family was on a heavy diet of Dr. Seuss and Richard Scarry," says Segal.

"It was meant to be a sort of parody directed more at adults than at children – it was something that I came up with in an irrational moment of inspiration."

Segal and some early Uncle Eli fans approached a number of publishers with his manuscript beginning in 1985, but they were unable to find anyone who was interested. Ten years later, Segal added the manuscript to his Web site so that it could be enjoyed by others.

"I started getting a lot of e-mails from people who had visited my Web site saying they thought that I should try

and get it published. After my previous experiences, I didn't think much of it until a publisher contacted me."

Since being published by San Francisco-based No Starch Press, a company which usually only prints computer books, Segal's book has become the company's best-selling book. Favorable reviews of the book have appeared in the Calgary Herald, the Los Angeles Times, and Newsday.

Given the book's success, a second printing seems imminent. Segal is also planning a sequel, which will focus on a different Jewish holiday.

So what's a Haggadah? Here's what it says in Uncle Eli's Glossary: "Jews in each generation are commanded to tell the wonderful story of their liberation from Egyptian slavery, especially at the Seder. The traditional text that is used for this is called the Haggadah ('telling')."

When it's in stock, Uncle Eli's Passover Haggadah retails for \$26.95.

