

TooZooZEEM Is REAL

Carol Bloom Levin

My invitation to present *Haggadah Regatta* at the Detroit Jewish Book Fair 2019 came as a sweet surprise. I'm an Indie Author & Illustrator and this fair in West Bloomfield is the largest of its kind in the country. I had two months to prepare for five-minutes-of-fame on the Michigan Authors Panel.



How could I squeeze all I have say about a Haggadah that combines the best parts of a traditional Passover seder with the tale of seder on a matzah raft? I drafted script after script, trying to whittle my message to five minutes and get the fact across that this family Haggadah is for *everyone* at the seder. Little kids, teens and grown-ups can all learn from TooZooZEEM and his crew of shoes. This night is different from all others.

Nicola's Bookstore in Ann Arbor provided an answer. Lisa Wheeler, author of *People Don't Bite People* and her cuddly puppet were at the store, charming a small gathering of kids and parents. That's it! What if TooZooZEEM joined me at the Book Fair? Touring together would be great fun. Lisa steered me to Folkmanis Puppets.



I *oohed* and *aahed* through a virtual zoo of stuffies at Folkmanis.com, searching for Haggadah Regatta's four-legged kid. The company has been making puppets since 1976. I focused on their split hoof collection. Screaming Goat had a spotted coat. Lamb's ears were too short and Bleating Sheep's ears were black. Sadly, TooZooZEEM was missing. That night, I awoke from a dream and padded down the hall to my office. TooZooZEEM was in the catalog, after all. He was hiding in a Longwool Sheep costume.

The little kid found his way to my door three days later. A few necessary adjustments completed the magic. First, a good shearing. Then, a few tacks to pin down his ears. I grafted horns to his head and stitched glossy floss upon his nose. After much wiggling in his new life vest, TooZooZEEM bleated, *"It's my birthday! I'm REAL."*



Getting *real* requires practice. We played and replayed lots of puppeteering videos. And we shot our own videos to improve our routine. Now we're a team. We can gauge when to listen, and when to talk. When TooZooZEEM whispers in my ear, I scratch behind his ears. His favorite action is to stomp with the crew. We can be silly, and we can be serious. Our Yom Kippur debut with human kids featured TooZooZEEM, playing the scapegoat with "mistakes" we taped to his vest. Saying *I'm sorry* is easier when we say it with our friends.

TooZooZEEM makes holidays more fun. Join us for Passover!

LEARN ABOUT **HAGGADAH REGATTA:** www.carollevin.com

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6600 W Maple Road, West Bloomfield, Michigan

Michigan Authors Panel

November 3, 10 A.M.