

A Horn for Louis
PJOW Review by Hannah Kurland

Hi! My name is Pepperbird, and this is a review about the book, A Horn for Louis by Eric A. Kimmel. It's a fabulous short story and should be appropriate for all readers at PJ Our Way.

The book takes place in New Orleans at the beginning of the twentieth century. It centers around Louis Armstrong, the famous trumpet player. In the story, Louis - then a kid - really wants a trumpet, but can't afford it. He is friends with and works for a Jewish family named the Karnofskys—Papa, Mama, Alex and Morris. Over time, the Karnofskys learn that Louis wants trumpet. After Louis goes through a long, unfruitful search for a horn that will fit his small budget, the Karnofskys give him a trumpet as a gift for Hanukkah; however, Louis has mixed emotions about it. He feels like it's too luxurious of a gift and worries that they are pitying him; in the end he does want the horn. Papa Karnofsky teaches Louis that he can “pay it forward” by sharing with Louis about how when he first came to America with nothing in his pocket, he was loaned money and then paid it back to other families in need of a loan. By sharing this story with Louis, he hopes that Louis will understand that giving him the trumpet was not an act of pity, but an act of hope and kindness.

Through the process, Louis learns from the Karnofskys about “paying it forward” and about the concept of tzedakah (even though the Karnofskys never use that word in the book). Jewish history has a lot of stories like this. Since Jews have historically immigrated a lot, there have been a lot of loans to and from newcomers. My family tries to help refugees, loaning things and helping out, because our ancestors got loans to help start a new life in America. In the book, Louis also learns about Jewish customs and holidays, including keeping kosher and celebrating Hanukkah.

This book would be a good read-aloud book and/or a good read-to-yourself book. This book will be appealing to readers who are interested in music or stories about friendship.