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Nina Paley, Karen Roekard, Paula Bottone-Spencer and Kahlbie celebrate Roekard's version of the Haggadah.

A 'Haggadah' from the heart

By TRACIE WHITE
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IN SEPTEMBER, Karen Roekard made a deal with God. "I said, 'Look God, I'm living in a house I hate. If you are so good as to help me sell it, I'll finish (my book) and publish it.'"

A week and a half later, her Santa Cruz house sold at almost full price. Now Roekard's holding up her end of the bargain.

Last week, Roekard published her personalized version of the Jewish "Haggadah," a text which is traditionally read the first two nights of Passover. Roekard's version is called "The Santa Cruz Haggadah: A Coloring Book and Journal for the Evolving Consciousness." Passover begins March 29 this year.

She said her version is sanctioned by Jewish law and includes all the Hebrew and the traditional rituals and sayings. She's just added a little bit more.

"It's part of everything I've learned," Roekard said. It's part of being a radical in the '60s; of studying psychological theory in graduate school and being a rabbinical student; of attending years of Jewish parochial school and living on a Kibbutz in Israel.

It's also a gift from Roekard to a faith that she returned to only three years ago after leaving the religion for almost two decades.

The Haggadah tells the story of Passover. It's traditionally read in Hebrew, but few Jews read it in Hebrew any longer, Roekard said.

"For two nights we tell the Haggadah. It tells the story of how we were enslaved in Egypt and how



Karen Roekard personalized her Haggadah with space for journal entries and cartoons drawn by Nina Paley.

we were freed. It's a reminder of the traumas that Jews have gone through."

Jews have been writing their own versions of the Haggadah "forever," Roekard said. "There's more versions of it written than any other book."

The "Santa Cruz Haggadah" is a "working" Haggadah, Roekard said. It includes 36 journal pages for personal writings. It's also a coloring book that's illustrated with comics drawn by local car-

toonist Nina Paley.

"In my Orthodox Jewish childhood, the Haggadahs that we used at our Passover seders followed the prescribed text," Roekard writes in the introduction to her book. "My father led the Seder and did most of the reading thus following the traditional practice."

But once she understood the story line, it just got boring, Roekard said. It was the addition over the years of various interpretations and legends that gave Passover seders their special meaning.

Roekard grew up attending orthodox Jewish parochial schools on the East Coast during the '50s and '60s. When she was 19, she left the faith, frustrated by the role of woman in the religion.

She studied psychology at Boston University, graduated from business school, and worked as a consultant until 1987, when she headed for Southern California and a new life.

The corporate world in New York was replaced with breath work, yoga and massage in a laid-back Southern California atmosphere, she said.

"It was like another planet."

In 1988, she returned to the East Coast to help care for her dying mother. "My mother was always pained that I'd walked out on the Jewish faith." That's when she returned to the religion.

When her mother died, she returned to California and bought a house in Santa Cruz for tax purposes. It was an ugly house that she quickly wanted to sell. That's when she made the deal with God.

The book has been a coordinated effort with her neighbor, Paula Bottone Spencer who designed it, and Nina Paley who illustrated it.

For Roekard, it has also been a labor of love.

"I don't know if I'll ever have children," she said. "This is my child."

The "Santa Cruz Haggadah" is available at local book shops for \$21.95.