

**"An excellent children's novel"**

Kirkus Reviews

## When the HURRICANE Came

**N**ine-year old Gertie and her family have to leave their home quickly when Hurricane Katrina is about to flood New Orleans. Gertie must leave behind her friends, her house, all her "stuff" and life as she knew it before the storm. How will she deal with going to a new school, making new friends, and celebrating the Jewish holidays in a place she has never lived before? What is her plan to deal with what's happened and at the same time make the world a better place?



Sydney Taylor  
Manuscript  
Award Winner



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## CHAPTER ONE

# BEFORE TROUBLE CAME TO TOWN

**B**efore the hurricane, growing up in New Orleans was fun. I was in the fourth grade at the Jewish Academy and I knew how to read and write in both English and Hebrew, which I thought was pretty cool. I even had a copy of *The Cat in The Hat* in Hebrew, which was fun to read, even though it was a book for little kids. I loved the warm days when we had recess outside and I felt like the sun was kissing my face. I could climb higher on the outdoor gym set than anyone in my class, boys included, and on a clear day, I could see all the way to Lake Pontchartrain.

On Wednesday afternoons, Mom would take me and my brother, Jonah, to the Willow Wood



Nursing Home to visit mom's grandmother, my great grandma Rose. Wednesday was always bingo day there, and the nurses at the home let me call out the numbers, like "B 24, lucky B 24."

My brother Jonah, who's only five, would always try to copy me, but he got the numbers wrong. "B one, two, three, four," he said. I gave him my most annoying look. "Stop it Jonah," I said. "You're only mixing the old people up."

Grammy Rose loved playing bingo, and when I was there calling out the numbers, she would tell all her friends, "That's my great granddaughter Gertie calling the numbers. She's a math genius and my good luck girl." I was embarrassed and happy at the same time.

By the way, the name Gertie is my real name, not a nickname or short for anything. I was named for my grandmother, Gertrude, who died of cancer before I was born. Mom thought that Gertrude would have liked the name Gertie for me. I like it a whole lot better than "Giselle," which was the other name starting with the letter "g" that my parents were considering. There aren't any other girls named Gertie in my whole school. I think it makes me special. I also like the sound of my dad saying, "Good girl

Gertie," which, by the way, is called alliteration, when all the first letters are the same.

Anyway, enough about my name. I want to continue with my story of what life used to be like here in New Orleans. Every Thursday, after school, I took voice lessons. My hobby was singing and I had memorized all the words to Louis Armstrong's song, "What A Wonderful World," which is not so surprising in New Orleans where jazz is everyone's favorite music. I sang the song all the time, till my brother Jonah said it was giving him a headache and could I just stop it.

And Saturday morning, without fail, my mom and dad took my brother and me to services at Congregation Beth Israel. We would join the prayers at the Junior Congregation and then we would hang around to kiss the Torahs when they came out of the ark, and after services, we would eat cookies and sponge cake at the Kiddush. (A Kiddush is like a party at the synagogue with people and food, but it doesn't have to be anyone's birthday.)

Sometimes, when I was feeling brave, bored and a little bit bad, Jonah and I would sneak into the Kiddush room and eat a rainbow cookie or two before the morning services were even

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over. Jonah was just following me, copying me as usual. It was never his idea to sneak the cookies, and a couple of times I had to explain to him that he couldn't tell everyone what we were doing. It was a secret. But we never got in trouble for eating those cookies, and boy were they delicious!

That's how it used to be before August 29, 2005. That's the day when Hurricane Katrina came to New Orleans. Since that day, nothing has ever been the same.

