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Home Away from Home

FEATURING **GINGER™**

BY CYNTHIA HAIGH

Illustrated by Trish Rouelle





our
generation.

This is Ginger's story.



GINGER[™]

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

BY

CYNTHIA HAIGH

ILLUSTRATED BY TRISH ROUELLE

An Our Generation® book

MAISON BATTAT INC. *Publisher*

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to Susan Love.*

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For my sweet little June

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CONTENTS

Chapter One	No Place Like Home	Page 9
Chapter Two	The Warm Welcome	Page 17
Chapter Three	A Common Bond	Page 29
Chapter Four	Recipe for Disaster	Page 37
Chapter Five	Time Is Not on My Side	Page 42
Chapter Six	A Promise Is a Promise	Page 50
Chapter Seven	Nighttime Adventure	Page 55
Chapter Eight	Tingling with Christmas Spirit	Page 61
Chapter Nine	The Snowflake Ball	Page 71
Chapter Ten	Holiday Magic	Page 80
Chapter Eleven	The Christmas Eve Visitor	Page 85
Chapter Twelve	Ginger's Wish	Page 95

EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

*Big words, wacky words, powerful words, funny words...
what do they all mean? They are marked with this symbol *.
Look them up in the Glossary at the end of this book.*



Chapter One

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

The Christmas holidays were almost here—my very, very favorite time of the year. So why was I standing alone in the middle of my bedroom, close to having a full-blown hissy fit?

And why was I staring at my pink polka-dotted suitcase with the bright green bow that was jammed so full I couldn't zip it closed all the way? Not even after I had sat and bounced on it a few times while no one was looking!

Tomorrow morning, my mom and dad, my grandmother (whom I call "Mormor"), my Aunt Holly and I were leaving our home in Chicago to fly thousands of miles across the Atlantic Ocean to another country.

The plan was to visit the rest of my family



on my mom's side. I had never met those members of our family except for my Aunt Ingrid, who had come to visit us a couple of times.

They live in Sweden, which is in northern Europe in an area called Scandinavia. I should have been incredibly excited to visit another country and meet my relatives for the first time. Instead, there I was, gritting my teeth and just about one step away from stomping my feet in total frustration*.



I had to try to control myself. Mormor was across the hall in the guest room and she would not like to see me acting that way. She would describe it as “unbecoming.”

Mormor is the greatest grandmother *in the whole wide world*. She is kind, caring, generous and patient. I think she may also be one of the smartest grandmothers *in the whole wide world*. She has taught me so many things.

I could go on and on about how great my grandmother is. All I know is, when I grow up I want to be just like her.

She would have been upset to see me behave this way because she happens to think that I’m one of the best granddaughters *in the whole wide world*! I have a reputation* to live up to and the last thing I’d want to do is disappoint her. Behaving in a positive way is important to Mormor and I always want her to be proud of me.

So I took a deep breath, counted to five and tried to relax. Only then could I calmly



look at the piece of paper I clutched in my hand: “Ginger’s List of Things to Bring.”

It was a list of all the items I wanted to pack. I had placed a check mark next to those items I had already stuffed in my overflowing suitcase.

Mom said it was way too full. But how was I to leave home for a faraway country without all my special holiday mementos*?

How could I leave behind the woven-paper heart baskets that Aunt Holly and I had made last year? Or the stockings she had shown me how to embroider*? Or my special ball ornament that was covered in pink glitter and tied with a striped ribbon bow? Mormor gave that to me on my very first Christmas. Since then it has been hung on the tree every holiday.

Without all my special holiday treasures we may as well just cross Christmas off the calendar, I thought with a sigh.

There were so many things I just *had* to pack. Like the gnome ornament that Aunt



Holly had given me. That cute little fellow with his pointy hat and soft white beard spent most of his time on our Christmas tree. For extra fun, we would place him in different poses and include him in our family holiday photos.

One of my favorite pictures shows “Nutmeg Gnome” sitting with us around the table during our Christmas Eve meal. In another, he’s hanging on the Christmas tree, looking as though he’s munching on the garland of popcorn and cranberries we had strung around it.

That got me wondering if I needed to bring popcorn and cranberries... *Gee, do they even know what a cranberry is in Sweden? And what if they think it’s silly to hang food on the Christmas tree?*

But what was really getting to me and what I was most upset and sad about was the one thing I knew I’d never be able to pack—Mr. Snuggles, my precious rabbit.





A little over a year ago, on the morning of Halloween, I peered out the window and spied a fluffy, black-and-white rabbit at the foot of our steps. Mom and I had put out a big bale of hay with some jack-o'-lanterns for Halloween night. There sat a little rabbit, chomping away at our decorations!

When I opened the door, he immediately stopped chewing the hay and froze completely still. He looked at me as if to say, "What's the matter? I'm not doing anything wrong."

Mr. Snuggles has big floppy ears. He's also a wee bit chubby. Judging from his looks, my mom said he wasn't a wild rabbit. He was a domesticated rabbit. Mom explained that this meant he was tame, and used to being around people. She figured he was someone's lost pet.

Mom called our local animal shelter* and they took all the information about him.

In the meantime, one of my best friends, Caroline, and I made a "FOUND RABBIT"



flier. After we took a picture of Mr. Snuggles we pasted it on paper and included our phone number. We drew some bright orange carrots around the edges of the paper. It looked really eye-catching so we decided to make lots of copies.

Dad went along and helped us hang the fliers in stores and around the area where we lived. People seemed to be very curious and many gathered in front of the signs as soon as we posted them. Some people told us they would even walk around their own neighborhoods and check to make sure nobody's rabbit got out and was missing.

Weeks passed and no one ever contacted the animal shelter or us about a lost rabbit. I never told anyone, but I was secretly happy that no one claimed him. By that time we had become very attached to Mr. Snuggles.

Dad and I had spent many hours making him his own house. Dad called it "The Bunny Bungalow*." His house was just like a real



bungalow except it had hay covering the entire floor!

Every day after I got home from school he would immediately hop out of his little “bungalow” to see me. Whenever I sat down he’d jump up on my lap and cuddle there for as long as I let him stay.

Not only were we attached to him, but he was attached to us! Mr. Snuggles, our little snugglebunny, had become an important member of our family.



Now we were getting ready to leave Mr. Snuggles for the first time. Caroline was going to take care of him. I hoped that he wouldn’t think I was abandoning* him.

I was going to miss him so much.



Chapter Two

THE WARM WELCOME

That night, Caroline and her mom came over to our home so we could go over the instructions for the care of Mr. Snuggles. If there was anyone else who cared about him as much as I did, it was Caroline.

I knew that he couldn't be in better hands. Caroline always amazes me because she is the most responsible person *in the whole wide world*. If you want to get something done right, Caroline is the one to go to.

Ms. O'Leary, our teacher, has called her "Conscientious Caroline." She knew that if she used that particular word to describe Caroline we would learn that it means to be trustworthy and always careful to do the right thing.

Ms. O'Leary said that if a person's picture



was used in a dictionary to describe a trait*, a picture of Caroline would be there right next to the word “conscientious”!

As Caroline and her mom were leaving, I gave them a box of the flower-shaped Ginger Wish Cookies my mom and I had baked that morning. We have a tradition* of baking Ginger Wish Cookies during the holiday season.



Every year it's part of that tradition to give a box to each of my best friends, Caroline, Jenny and Megan. We always get together so that we can make a "ginger wish."

We each hold a cookie in the palm of one hand and think of a secret wish. And then, with the index* finger of our other hand, we tap the cookie in the middle. Whoever cracks her cookie into three pieces has her wish come true.

Last year, all four of us cracked each of our cookies in three pieces. Imagine that—all of our wishes were going to come true!

Because I wouldn't be home for the holiday this year, we pinky-swore that we would make our ginger wish at 8:00 p.m. on Tuesday night, two days after I would arrive in Sweden. Even though we couldn't *be* together, we would be doing the same *thing* together.

My mom and dad peeked into my room to remind me that it was almost bedtime and I needed to get up early for our flight to Sweden the next morning.



Mom suggested that I wrap up the ginger cookies in foil and place the heart baskets in a cardboard folder. She said I should pack them last since they were to go in my polka-dotted travel case, which I was carrying on the plane.

I decided I'd leave them on the counter and pack them in the morning. They would just fit on top of all the tissue paper that was rolled up to protect my special pink glitter ball ornament that Mom agreed to let me bring.

It was really hard for me to sleep because I wasn't looking forward to the long, boring flight ahead. I was disappointed about not having a traditional Christmas here in Chicago and I was feeling blue* about missing Mr. Snuggles so much.

And I was really, *really* anxious* about meeting my cousins for the first time. *What if we don't have anything in common?* I wondered. *Even worse, what if we don't like each other?*



Morning arrived. Mom must have been so tired tending to all the last-minute details the night before that she set the alarm wrong. Instead of entering 5:30 *a.m.* the alarm was set for 5:30 *p.m.*

It was a good thing I was restless and couldn't sleep that well because I awoke earlier than usual at 6:00 a.m.

We had to rush around and gather up our things. My mom and dad grabbed our plane tickets and we practically flew out the door. I barely had enough time to give Mr. Snuggles a big kiss and a hug.

Wouldn't you know the traffic was backed up for miles on our way to the airport?!

My dad is always calm and nothing ever seems to get him upset. Everyone likes to say that he's as "cool as a cucumber." Well, even *he* was getting nervous that we would be late. He was actually talking to himself!

I wondered if there was an expression "as warm as a pepper," or something like that. I



sure could have used one to describe my dad when his face was getting all red and he was mumbling under his breath the entire ride!

Fortunately, we arrived at the airport just in the nick of time. The airport terminal was all decked out in fancy decorations and sparkling lights. Aunt Holly remarked how festive* everything looked.

But I couldn't help notice *all the people*—they were *everywhere*. The whole airport was bustling* with everyone rushing to get to their flights on time. There were long lines and many people looked worn out and tired.

There were college students with big backpacks. They looked happy to be heading home. I saw grandparents carrying gifts and families with children and babies in strollers.

I wondered if they were excited to be getting away for the holidays. Or were they like me? Were they nervous about where they were going? Were they unhappy not to be home for the holidays?



We waited in the security line for what seemed like a year. I was so excited when we finally boarded the plane. I sat next to Mormor.

After the plane took off, Mormor and I did some word puzzles, which was a lot of fun. And she shared some family history that I didn't know about how our ancestors* immigrated* to America from Sweden.

“That’s why you call me ‘Mormor.’ It is a Swedish word for your grandmother on your mother’s side. I always called my grandmother ‘Mormor’ and I called my grandmother on my father’s side ‘Farmor.’ I wanted to follow that tradition with you and your cousins,” she explained.

She continued on, telling me how her grandparents and her great-grandparents came to America in the late 1800s.

I was really curious to know why they left their homes to go live in another country.

“At that time, there weren’t enough jobs in Sweden for everyone,” Mormor said. “They



came to America where there were lots of jobs and they felt they'd have a better life."

Many of the immigrants were farmers so they moved to places where there was plenty of farmland. Illinois was one of those places.

After a generation* or two, many Swedish-Americans moved to the city. Chicago had more Swedish-Americans than any other city in the United States.

I thought about how worried I was, leaving my home to spend the holidays in Sweden. *Some of those people were leaving their homes forever.* Boy, did I feel a little silly.

All of those people were going to a strange country with a strange language and I was upset about going to Sweden for less than *two weeks!*

I wondered why my aunt Ingrid lived in Sweden instead of America. Mormor smiled. "Back when your aunt was going to college in Chicago, she met this nice young man who happened to be studying in the United States.



He was from Sweden.”

They began dating and then they fell in love. Aunt Ingrid went to visit him in Sweden and she loved it there. That “nice young man” became my uncle Max. After they got married, they ended up living near Stockholm, which is the capital of Sweden and its largest city.

“How did he know English?” I asked.

Mormor said most Swedes speak English. All students start to learn English in third grade.

Mormor and I started getting sleepy.

I decided to read a chapter from one of my books about a girl who experiences life as one fun adventure after another. I giggled out loud when I read how she would sleep backwards in her bed.

I may be adventurous and try something different like that, I thought. Or maybe I'll even wear my pajamas backwards!

After a while I fell asleep, which made the long flight seem to go by much faster. I woke up to the sound of the pilot announcing that we



would be landing shortly.

The pilot told us what the time was in Sweden since their time is seven hours ahead of our time in Chicago. He described the weather as being somewhat cold with snow expected.

The plane landed smoothly and it took some time to collect our luggage, but we made it out the door at last!

Standing there, in a roped-off area, were Aunt Ingrid, Uncle Max and my cousins, Brigitta and Hans. They looked a little older than they did in the last pictures that had been sent to us. Brigitta is older than I am by a little more than a year and Hans is younger than I am.

Aunt Ingrid and Uncle Max were holding a welcoming banner that was hand-written:

Mormor, Aunt Astrid, Aunt Holly,
Uncle Rob and Ginger—
Welcome to Sweden with all our love!



Brigitta also held up a smaller sign that read:

*Thank You for Visiting Us,
Cousin Ginger!*

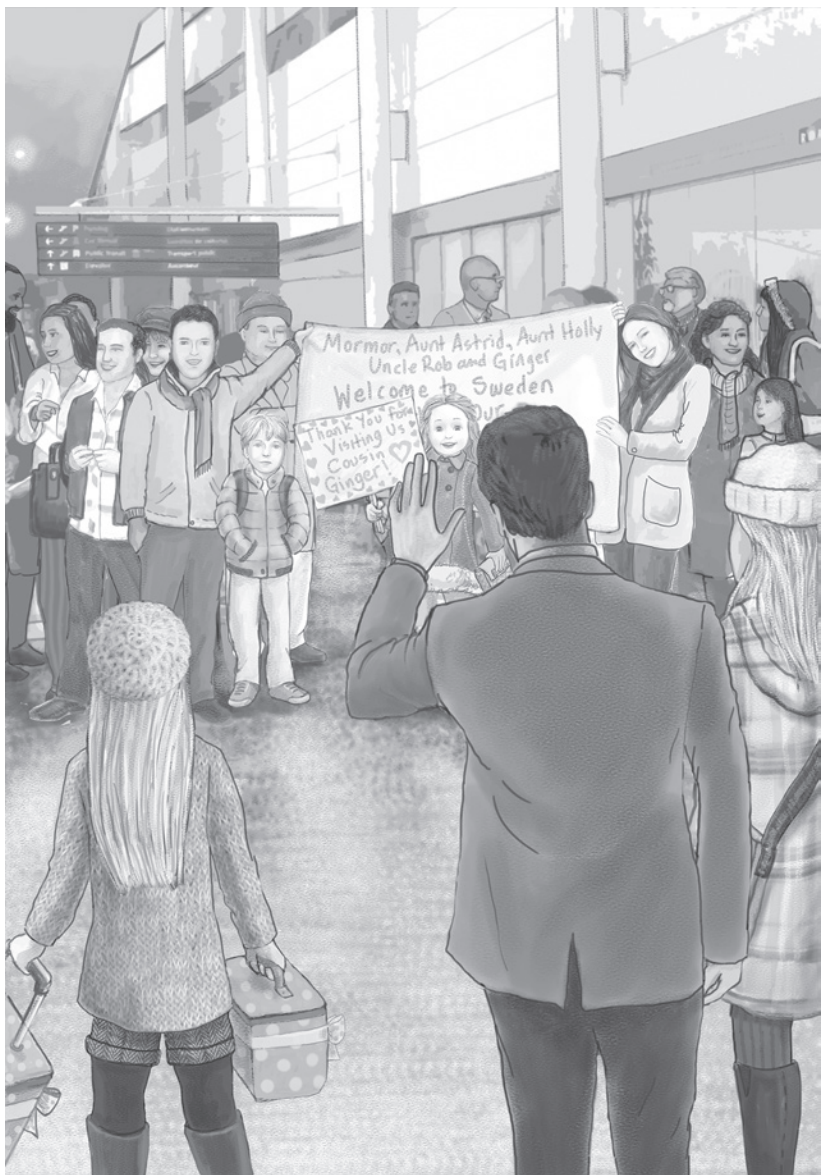
It had a border of red hearts. Gosh, those signs made me feel so much better.

I happened to notice that Hans stood behind the others with his hands in his coat pockets. It seemed strange that he was the only one not holding a sign.

The adults started happily shrieking and then hugging and kissing. My aunt and uncle kissed each of us, first on one side of our face and then on the opposite side. My dad had told me earlier that this is the custom in Europe.

Aunt Ingrid wrapped her arms around me so tight that I thought I would crack in half. Actually I was thinking I was going to crack in three pieces—just like a *ginger cookie*!





Chapter Three

A COMMON BOND

Brigitta had a smile as big as Lake Michigan. “I have never been so excited in all my life! I am so happy we finally got to meet each other. I have waited so long for this occasion!” she exclaimed, as she jumped up and down.

Hans was another matter. He looked at me and then he looked down at his shoes. Aunt Ingrid gently poked Hans, “Say hello to your cousin Ginger.”

“Hello,” he said, without looking up.

It’s a good thing Brigitta seems so happy to be meeting me, I thought, because Hans sure doesn’t seem thrilled.

We left the airport and Aunt Ingrid and Uncle Max were each driving a car. I was



relieved to learn that the girls were to travel in one car and the boys in another.

It was fun to look out the window and see all the different houses. Many had very tall roofs. Some had wood planks going up and down instead of rows of wood going side to side. A lot of the houses were painted interesting colors, and most were not at all like the houses in my neighborhood back home in Chicago.

When we arrived at my aunt and uncle's house, it looked like something out of a storybook. My mom called it charming. It was red with black trim and had two chimneys. Hanging on the door was a large green wreath, dotted with pinecones and tied with a red bow.

We walked inside, and draped across the fireplace was another big banner that said "*God Jul!*" which is Swedish for Merry Christmas. In the corner of the room stood a tall, beautiful Christmas tree. Uncle Max said it was a spruce, a tree that grows in many parts of Sweden. It reminded me of the Christmas trees we have at



home, and that made me feel a little homesick.

The tree was decorated with ornaments of animals that were made out of straw. Also hanging on the branches were the most delicious-looking candy and treats, which I learned Brigitta and Hans had helped make.

I laughed to myself when I saw it. To think I was worried that they would view me as weird because I placed garlands of popcorn and cranberries on our Christmas tree *while theirs*



was almost completely covered with food!

We all sat down to talk and enjoy some warm drinks. All of us, that is, except for Hans. He quickly retreated* upstairs to his bedroom. I think he may have resented* us for spoiling his Christmas. Well, at least Hans and I had something in common because my Christmas wasn't going to be the same either!

After a while, Brigitta brought me upstairs to show me her bedroom. It was a large room that was very bright and cheerful. Two matching white beds were covered with pretty purple-flowered comforters and puffy pillows. A shaggy rug was on the floor.

Brigitta and I had many things to talk about. We found out that we have a lot in common, especially when it comes to collecting.

Brigitta loves dogs. She has a shelf full of dog statues. In fact, just about anything with a dog on it has made it into her collection.

I also noticed several Dala horses on her nightstand. They are small wooden horses,



painted with bright designs and colors.

But the thing that is really amazing and coincidental* is that we both collect snow globes! *What are the chances of that?* I thought.

Brigitta has a few snow globes with Christmas scenes. One is a Christmas tree coated in snow and another shows skaters on a frozen pond. A musical globe of a sleigh plays a holiday song when it's wound up.

It was getting late, so Brigitta and I decided to get some sleep. While she changed into her plaid nightgown, I pulled my favorite pajamas that have bunnies, foxes, owls and bears on them out of my suitcase and set my small travel case aside. I figured I could unpack everything else the next morning.

Brigitta plopped down on her bed and said, "Ginger, kick your feet up and relax."

I immediately put my head at the bottom of the bed and my feet up on the pillow. Brigitta laughed so hard.

"Is this how you all sleep in America?"



she asked.

“No,” I answered, “I got the idea from a book I read about a girl who always slept that way so she could wiggle her toes.”

“Good night, Ginger, sweet dreams,” she said. Brigitta giggled as she turned off the light.

“And sweet dreams to you, Brigitta.”

What a difference one night made. Instead of being nervous and worried I was starting to feel a little more relaxed and happy to have made the trip.

Looking back to the previous night, all I could think was *am I ever glad I didn't have that hissy fit. What a silly scene that would have been!*



The next morning I woke up refreshed from a good night's sleep. Brigitta had gotten up a little earlier and gone downstairs to help get breakfast ready.





Even though it was late, the adults were still sitting around the kitchen table in their robes and slippers. They were drinking coffee, reminiscing* and laughing about old times.

Hans was listening to their conversation but he quickly got up, tucked his chair under the table and dashed upstairs.

Gosh! I thought sourly. *What's up with him?*



Chapter Four

RECIPE FOR DISASTER

The table was covered with a cheery red-and-green tablecloth and several different kinds of food that I had never seen served for breakfast. Brigitta was eating an open-faced sandwich. It consisted of one slice of dark wheat bread with a creamy spread and some cucumbers on top!

For a moment I wondered if I had overslept longer than I thought and that it was really lunchtime. Brigitta assured me it was still breakfast time and explained that open-faced sandwiches are a typical breakfast in Sweden.

A pretty basket held the most yummy-looking buns that were filled with almond paste and a type of red jam I had never had before. Next to that was a large platter overflowing



with delicious fresh fruit. Some of the berries on it looked like tiny strawberries.

Something that did look familiar was the cereal. It was muesli, which we also eat at home and is similar to granola. It's made from oats, nuts and dried fruit.

Brigitta made me a sandwich out of a whole-grain cracker with orange marmalade on top, and then I had some muesli and fruit. *I know one thing*, I thought. *There's so much food I'll never have to worry about going hungry or my stomach growling!*



After breakfast, Brigitta and I went upstairs and I began to unpack, since I had been way too tired to do it the night before. I decided I'd start by unwrapping the Ginger Wish Cookies and the heart baskets.

All of a sudden I got a sinking feeling. They were not in my polka-dotted travel case. "Oh no!" I shouted. "I forgot to pack them!"



I must have left them on the counter in my rush to leave quickly so we wouldn't miss our flight."

Brigitta assured me that things would be fine. "Don't worry, Ginger. We can make heart baskets and even bake some more ginger cookies, too."

She quickly ran downstairs and came back up with a heart basket that she had made with her mom, dad and Hans.

"They're easy to make," said Brigitta. "We can do it together."

Even though I figured it would never be as special as the ones I forgot to bring, since I had made mine with Aunt Holly, it would be fun to make a heart basket with my cousin.

Brigitta was very ambitious* because she also wanted to make a batch of Ginger Wish Cookies. She told me that she and Hans make cookies like them every year. They are traditional cookies in Sweden, called "*pepparkakor*."

We hurried back downstairs and asked my mom for a list of all the ingredients.

As I read it out loud, Brigitta looked in the



cabinet to make sure we had everything.

I would say “flour” and she would say, “check.” And then I’d say “sugar” and she’d say, “sugar, check.” When I finally got to the bottom of the list, the last ingredient I rattled off was “ginger.” After a few moments she pulled out a spice jar filled with ginger and said, “check.” We both happily squealed, “Yay!”

We had every ingredient from the recipe. Now we could make Ginger Wish Cookies!

We both began measuring everything and putting all of it in order on the counter. Brigitta read the directions and I followed them.

In between we chatted about all sorts of things, like our hobbies, friends, school, music and movies. And of course we had to talk about our prized possessions—our snow globes.

The cookie dough was finally mixed and we began to roll it out. As we used cookie cutters to cut out the shapes it seemed a little gooey. We figured that after baking, the cookies would become crisp and golden.



My mom helped place the cookie sheet in the oven and we set the timer for nine minutes.

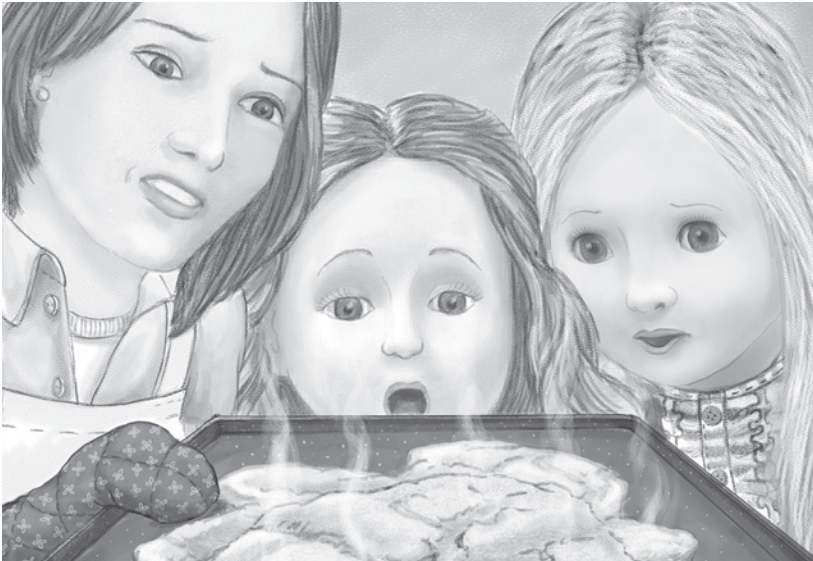
After a few minutes we could smell them, and what a delicious smell it was! We could hardly wait till the timer rang.

Bing bing bing went the timer and we both jumped up so fast we knocked one of the chairs over. Aunt Ingrid helped take the cookies out of the oven.

“*Oh no!*” I yelped.

“*Oh no, no, no,*” moaned Brigitta.

We couldn’t believe what we saw.



Chapter Five

TIME IS NOT ON MY SIDE

There in front of us, looking like one gooey glob, was the biggest, soggiest-looking cookie *in the whole wide world!*

Our first attempt at making Ginger Wish Cookies was a disaster. How could we have goofed up the recipe?

Meanwhile, Aunt Holly giggled as she quickly grabbed her camera to photograph it.

“What about our wish?” I frantically asked. “I pinky-swore with my friends that we would crack our ginger cookies tonight at eight o’clock. Not only can I not break my promise, but it would be terrible to break a tradition that we’ve had together for so long.”

“Don’t worry, Ginger. We have enough ingredients to start another batch,” Brigitta



said, trying to comfort me.

Almost in unison* we declared that this time we would *really really* concentrate on mixing the exact amounts of the recipe.

So once again we mixed the ingredients. We were much more careful. We checked and double-checked that we were following the recipe to a “T”*.

And then we waited.

In the meantime, Aunt Holly showed us the photo she had printed out. She called it “The Largest Ginger Cookie in the Whole Wide World,” since she says that seems to be my favorite expression!

Bing bing bing went the timer—the nine minutes were up. We held our breath as Aunt Ingrid opened the oven door. This time we looked at piping hot, crisp, golden cookies.

They were delicious-looking and perfectly formed. We set them aside to cool and I must say, it sure was tempting to pop a couple in our mouths. But we knew better.





I discovered just how talented Brigitta is. She is very artistic and loves doing arts and crafts projects. She brought out several boxes filled to the brim with supplies, including paper, paint and sparkles.

“My mom, dad, Hans and I love to make things,” said Brigitta excitedly.

“Yes, I can see that,” I said, “There’s enough stuff in those boxes to build another Eiffel Tower!”

Just seeing all the different materials made me want to create something but I wasn’t sure exactly what it would be. Right then Brigitta said, “I have an idea. We have enough stuff to make snowflakes for the Snowflake Ball.”

“What’s the Snowflake Ball?” I asked.

“It’s a big party held downtown at the Art and Music Center,” Brigitta explained. “We go every year. Everyone who buys a ticket to get in can bring a homemade snowflake. There’s a



contest with different categories like funniest snowflake, coldest-looking, most beautiful and most unusual.

“Last year my dad won a ribbon for “The Fastest-melting Snowflake.” He put together a huge snowflake wearing a hula skirt with a sunbeam shining down on it.”

“That sounds like it should have also won the funniest category,” I laughed.

Brigitta went on to tell me that all the money from the sale of tickets goes to the Art and Music Center, which offers art and music classes for everyone, children as well as adults.

We began making snowflakes. Brigitta was so creative. I tried, but I was no match for her.

I ended up with a snowflake that looked like a hexagon-shaped plate. Since it looked just like the six-sided white dinner plates we eat off of every night at home, I thought I’d put some food on it and call it “The Hungry Snowflake.”

“Wow, that’s great, Ginger, and so imaginative,” Brigitta said enthusiastically*.



That was enough to make me feel proud. *My cousin, Brigitta, probably one of the most artistic and creative girls in the whole wide world, is telling me how great my snowflake is!*

We carefully wrapped up our snowflakes and put them aside. The next night was the Snowflake Ball and we were ready!



We had just finished dinner. Hans, Brigitta and I were helping to clean up and wash the dishes. All of a sudden I panicked*. “What time is it?” I asked. “I have to make sure I crack my Ginger Wish Cookie at exactly 8:00 p.m.!”

“It’s 8:10,” said Hans.

“Oh no!” I yelled. “This can’t be—I was supposed to be cracking my ginger cookie ten minutes ago! I made a promise to my friends that we would all crack our cookies and make a wish at the exact same time!”

I slumped onto the kitchen chair with my head in my hands. *How could this have happened?* I thought. *I miss my friends. I miss my home. I miss Mr. Snuggles. And I’ve missed my opportunity to crack my cookie with Caroline, Jenny and Megan!*

“If it makes you feel any better, they haven’t cracked their cookies either,” Hans said coolly.

I was puzzled. “What do you mean?”

“Well, we’re in a different time zone,”



Hans replied. "We are seven hours ahead of Chicago. That means it's only 1:10 in the afternoon there. So your friends haven't cracked their cookies yet."

"Wow, thanks Hans. I never even thought of that," I said.

"The reason I thought of it right away is that I did a school project on time zones. I found out a lot of things...like how the earth rotates slowly. And that any time the sun is directly above us it means it's noon where we are.

"But when it's noon here it's midnight someplace else. Someplace else happens to be halfway around the world from us," he said.

He explained that the world is divided up into 24 different time zones. Each zone is one hour apart. So if we are traveling east, it's one hour later each time we cross a time zone. If we go west, it would be one hour earlier each time.

I got to thinking not just about time zones, but about how well Hans explained it all



to me. He didn't come off as a know-it-all and he certainly didn't make me feel stupid. This was a side of Hans I hadn't seen since we met.

Since we were talking about zones, I guess you could say this was a whole different zone he was in. Not his usual "be-by-myself" zone where he seemed to just want to get away and not be around me.

I realized there were important things to decide. *Should I set my alarm so that I'll get up and be cracking my ginger cookie when it's 8:00 p.m. in Chicago? That would mean I'd have to get up before 3:00 in the morning!*

There was only one answer. After all, I had made a promise and I, Ginger, trustworthy and responsible citizen* of the great Windy City of Chicago, keep my promises.



Chapter Six

A PROMISE IS A PROMISE

I began to think more about my plan. *Would it be rude to sneak downstairs in the middle of the night? Should I ask Aunt Ingrid and Uncle Max and my mom and dad ahead of time? Maybe I should ask Brigitta what I should do.*

Once we got upstairs I decided to tell Brigitta all about my plan.

“Wow, that sounds fun, Ginger,” she said. “I know that this is a special tradition you have with your friends, but do you think I can do it with you? Do you think I can crack a Ginger Wish Cookie, too?”

At that moment I thought how great it was that my cousin Brigitta wanted to take part in my tradition. I had begun to think of her as



one of the best cousins *in the whole wide world* and now she wanted to be included in my plan.

“I would love it if you did, Brigitta, but I think we better let your mom and dad know that we’ll be sneaking down into the kitchen at night,” I said.

“Yes, maybe you’re right, Ginger,” Brigitta agreed. “Let’s go tell them now what we plan to do,” Brigitta said.

“On second thought, Brigitta, I think we need to *ask* them if what we want to do is all right,” I stated.

“OK, then let’s go downstairs now and get it over with,” she replied.

We both went downstairs to find everyone still sitting around and cheerfully chatting. Brigitta was the one who first broached* the subject with her parents.

Their reply was that we both really needed our sleep and it was just *too late* at night or *too early* in the morning, depending on how one was to look at it.



Mormor piped up, “Oh let them do it. It’s important to them and Brigitta will now be able to participate in Ginger’s tradition, too. It’s only taking place this one time. If they’re really tired they can sleep later.”

Mormor understood that it is a tradition that I hold close to my heart.

“All right, you both can do it, but you must not make a lot of noise,” said Aunt Ingrid.



“And I really think you both need some supervision at that time of night,” my mom said softly as she pulled me aside.

Aunt Holly overheard what Mom said.

“Girls, just wake me up. What you’re doing sounds like a lot of fun. After all, when will I ever get a chance to crack a ginger cookie and make a wish at three o’clock in the morning?” Aunt Holly laughed.

“And besides, I haven’t had an adventure like this in a long time.”

Brigitta and I were thrilled. We thought of our parents as being a bit strict so it was always great to have Aunt Holly around to liven things up. We were excited that she was going to be a part of the Ginger Wish Cookie tradition.

Brigitta and I rushed upstairs to set our alarm. We quickly changed into our pajamas and jumped into our cozy, warm beds. We had important business to tend to and we needed our rest!





Suddenly I was jolted out of a sound sleep...

COCKADOODLE-DOO!

“What?!” I gasped, as I popped up in my bed. “Brigitta! Wake up! There’s a rooster in your house!”

COCKADOODLE-DOO!



Chapter Seven

NIGHTTIME ADVENTURE

“No,” Brigitta said in a sleepy voice as she pressed the button on the alarm clock. “There’s a Hans in my house and he played a little trick on us,” she explained.

“You can set this to make animal noises, bells, and even songs. I guess Hans thought that since we were getting up so early, he’d put on the animal that wakes us up at sunrise.”

That Hans is full of surprises, I thought. I rubbed my eyes and looked at the glowing numbers on the clock. 2:50 a.m.!

We quietly slid out of bed and crept into Aunt Holly’s bedroom. There she stood, all ready for her “adventure.”

The three of us tiptoed downstairs and into the kitchen.



We spotted the cookie jar on the table. I lifted off the lid and we each reached in for one.

Aunt Holly spoke about the memories she had of when she was a young girl. She and Aunt Ingrid, my mom and Mormor would make ginger cookies every holiday.

Before bedtime, they would crack the cookies and make a wish at the same time. Aunt Holly remembered how much fun it was for all of them, and especially how much my mother loved the tradition.

Brigitta didn't realize how I got my name so Aunt Holly explained why my mom named me "Ginger." She told her that it was to remind my mom of those fond holiday memories when they were all together.

Aunt Holly suddenly declared there was just a minute to go until three o'clock so we all had to get in "position" to crack our cookies.

"Remember," I said, "if it breaks in three pieces your wish will come true."

"Are we all ready?" asked Aunt Holly.



“Yes!” we both responded.

“Ready, set, go,” I said in a very urgent but hushed voice.

Each of us opened our palms. Aunt Holly had three pieces. Brigitta had three pieces.

“Oh no!” I said as I began to count. “One, two, three, four, five pieces!” I groaned.

“Ginger, I think you were just being overly enthusiastic,” said Aunt Holly tenderly.

“Oh well,” I said. “I guess getting my wish this year is no big deal.”

Deep down inside I knew it was. I didn’t want them to know how disappointed I was.

After all, I didn’t want to ruin it for them. I was so glad that Aunt Holly got to join us and make her wish after not doing it for all those years. And I was really pleased that Brigitta got her wish the very first time we tried it together.

Aunt Holly suggested we all head upstairs and get back into our warm beds.

“It’s early morning and we still have a lot to do in preparation for the holidays,” she said.





The three of us hugged each other. This time we each tiptoed *up* the stairs. When we got to the top landing Aunt Holly whispered, “Goodnight girls, and thank you for letting me be part of this. I really enjoyed sharing those special moments with you.”

She kissed us both on our foreheads and went into her room.

Brigitta and I quietly got into bed. Just after Brigitta turned off her light she asked somewhat hesitantly, “Ginger, do you really think that wishes come true?”

“I don’t know how it works for everyone else, but I know that every time my friends and I cracked our ginger cookies our wishes came true,” I assured her.

“That’s good,” she said, “and thanks for letting me be part of it, too. I’m so glad you’re my cousin. Tonight was exciting—I never got to do anything like that before.”

“Even though I won’t get my wish, it was fun for me, too,” I said. “Not only did I get to



keep my promise to my friends, but I got an added bonus of sharing this tradition with you and Aunt Holly.”

“Goodnight, Ginger, see you in the morning,” said Brigitta.

“Goodnight, Brigitta,” I answered.

I rolled over and thought about a lot of things. *Were Caroline, Jenny and Megan able to crack their cookies in three pieces? Did they do it at exactly the moment we did? Are they going to get their wishes? And would I be able to get over the fact that I wouldn't get my wish?*

There was so much to think about, yet I was getting so sleepy.

I knew we had another busy day ahead of us. The Snowflake Ball was taking place that night and I could hardly wait!



Chapter Eight

TINGLING WITH CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

Brigitta and I must have been very tired because we sure did sleep late. We discovered that we weren't the only ones who were exhausted. When we went downstairs for breakfast, Aunt Holly's door was still closed. She needed a little extra sleep after our nighttime adventure, too.

The breakfast table was once again filled with a variety of food. I noticed the same red jam that was at yesterday's breakfast was on the table again. Brigitta said it was lingonberry jam.

"A what-on-berry?!" I asked.

Aunt Ingrid explained that it grows in Sweden and is a close relative of the cranberry.

I giggled. "Like a cousin?" I asked.



Aunt Ingrid chuckled and said that describing the two similar berries as cousins is a good way of putting it.

“Sometimes people call them ‘alpine cranberries,’” she continued.

I decided to try it on a *knackebrod*, which is the Swedish name of a piece of crisp bread, and it was delicious.

All of a sudden an idea popped into my head.

“If they’re called ‘alpine cranberries’ does that mean we can use them in place of cranberries to string with our popcorn for the Christmas tree?” I asked.

“Most certainly,” Aunt Ingrid replied.

“Tomorrow we’ll string them and put the finishing touches on the tree,” Brigitta reminded us. “But the Snowflake Ball is *tonight*, and we have lots of things to do *today*!”

We needed to make sure that we had our handmade snowflakes finished and ready to enter into the Snowflake Ball contest.





Mine was wrapped up in tissue paper and ready to go. Brigitta had worked on several snowflakes and she had to decide which one to enter into the contest.

We asked Hans if he wanted to join us with our last minute details in preparation for the ball. In his somewhat standoffish* manner he said his snowflake was complete and he had taken care of everything.

Brigitta narrowed down her selection and decided to bring the snowflake she had spent



the most time on, which was a very fancy one.

She called it “The Newborn Snowflake.” Using cotton balls and shiny blue paper, she had created what appeared to be a big cloud with water droplets inside.

Underneath hung a baby snowflake wrapped in a blanket. Attached was a “birth certificate” explaining where the snowflake came from and how it was formed.

I was amazed at how much Brigitta and Hans knew. They really loved to learn and discover new things. They made everything interesting, and it sure made it fun for me!



In the afternoon, Mom and Aunt Ingrid took Brigitta and me for a quick ride to the downtown open-air market. I wore my quilted vest over a striped shirt. With my snow pants and winter boots, I was toasty warm.

Once we arrived, we stepped out of our car to walk in the cool, crisp outdoor air. We



glimpsed twinkling lights and heard carolers singing in the distance.

As we got closer to the market the smell of baked apple strudel and other scrumptious sweets flowed all around us.

“Mmmmmm....” I said, breathing in deeply.

All of these wonderful things hit me with a huge tingle of Christmas spirit!

Aunt Ingrid and Brigitta went one way and my mom and I headed in a different direction so my mom could get some last-minute presents and keep them as a surprise.

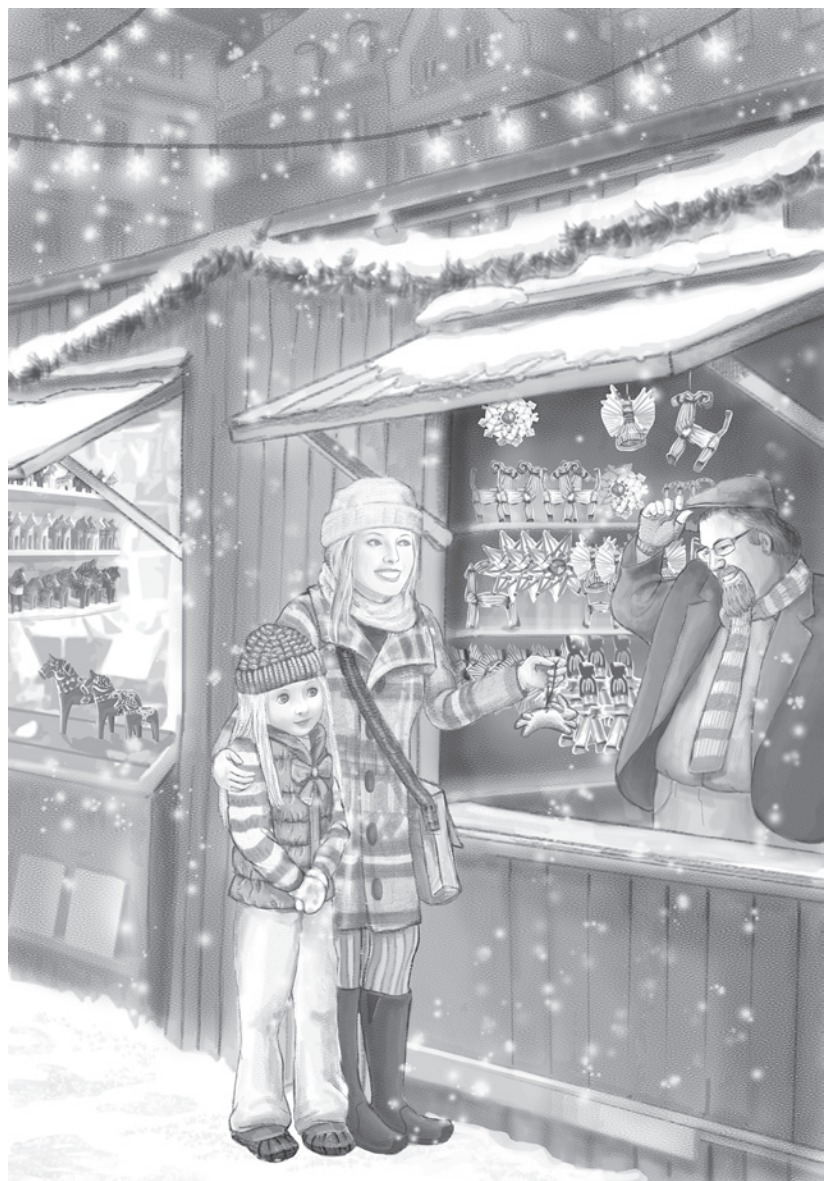
As we strolled* among rows of little lighted huts with loads of interesting objects for sale, snowflakes started to fall.

It felt good to be there because it reminded me of Christkindlmarket in Chicago, where we go every holiday season.

This is the perfect place to find perfect gifts! I thought.

People gathered around a hut where a man





was selling brightly painted Dala horses, like the ones Brigitta collected. I asked my mom if I could buy three, each in a different color. I knew they would be great souvenirs* from Sweden to bring back to Caroline, Jenny and Megan.

At another hut we spotted the cutest ornament carved from wood into the shape of a bunny. I don't think we could have ever found a better gift for Caroline to thank her for taking such good care of Mr. Snuggles!



Back at the house we realized it was time to pick out the outfits we would be wearing to the Snowflake Ball.

Brigitta opened the doors to her wardrobe, which had a closet space with shelves, a mirror and a drawer, all in one. Hanging inside were two beautiful dresses. One stood out. It was a long white satin dress with a red sash.

I wondered if she ever wore it. She said she had just worn it last week on Saint Lucia's



Day, which is on the thirteenth of December each year.

“Legend says it is the longest night of the year in Sweden and the day that the Christmas season really begins,” she explained.

To celebrate this day, the oldest daughter, a Lucia, wears a long white dress with a red sash, just like Brigitta’s. She also wears a crown made of evergreens or twigs, lit with seven battery-operated candles.

She brings coffee, ginger biscuits and special buns called “Lucia cats” to her parents and younger brothers and sisters while they are still in bed.

“That sounds fun,” I said. “I wonder why we don’t have anything like that in America.”

Brigitta brought out her other dress, which was shimmering gold with ruffles along the hem, and a fuchsia-pink satin jacket. Perfect for the holiday!

What will I wear? I thought. I had only packed one special dress that my mom and I



had picked out for Christmas Eve.

I mentioned to Brigitta that I wasn't sure if my mom would think it was all right to wear it twice—on Christmas Eve *and* to the ball.

I couldn't ask her right away because Mom was helping with the decorating for the Snowflake Ball and probably wouldn't be back for a while.

When I showed my red dress with layers of ruffles all around the bottom to Brigitta she immediately said, "Wow, that is one of the prettiest dresses I have ever seen!"

She paused for a few seconds.

"Hmm, we really need to find out if your mom will think it's OK to wear it before Christmas Eve."

All of a sudden she had an idea.

"We've got to ask Mormor what she thinks! She'll probably know exactly what your mom will say."

"Brilliant idea, Brigitta!" I exclaimed.

Both of us bolted downstairs and found



Mormor alone in the kitchen. We explained our problem.

“Do you think my mom would mind if I wore my Christmas Eve dress tonight to the Snowflake Ball?” I asked.

“Well, I don’t know why she would have a problem with that. I can’t think of any better event to wear it to. It’s silly to only wear it once,” Mormor said.

Just then my mom walked in the back door and saw us.

“You all look like you’re plotting* something—what’s up?” she asked.



Chapter Nine

THE SNOWFLAKE BALL

Mormor explained that I wanted to wear my special dress to the Snowflake Ball.

“That certainly makes sense. I can’t think of a better event to wear it to,” she said smiling.

Mormor, Brigitta and I let out a loud giggle all at once.

“Did I say something wrong?” my mom asked.

“No,” I said. “We’re laughing because that’s almost *exactly* what Mormor said when we asked her what she thought!”

Mom joined in the laughter.



Brigitta and I couldn’t wait to try on our dresses. I put my dress on and placed each foot



carefully into my shiny red shoes and added a matching headband. And then I twirled around so Brigitta could see.

“You look like someone out of a magazine.” She paused and said, “You know what? That’s giving me an idea. How about putting on a family fashion show?”

“Wow, what a great idea,” I said. “Let’s try to round everyone up.”

As usual, Hans was in his room, behind a closed door.

Mom, Aunt Ingrid and Aunt Holly were sipping tea and relaxing after their hard work helping to decorate the ballroom.

Dad and Uncle Max were busy in the kitchen. Dad was making his famous candy cane cupcakes for the bake sale at the ball.

Mormor was making a snowflake for the contest. Brigitta gave her the box with all the materials and Mormor went to work on her “happy” snowflake with a big smiling face.

“These past few days we’ve had together



have been wonderful,” said Mormor, “I guess this is a good way to express how I feel.”

“Mormor, that’s just how we feel. Hans and I are so glad everybody is together for the holidays,” said Brigitta.

Hans? Did I hear her correctly? Hans? All Hans does is stay in his room all the time with his door shut. Hans is happy we are all together? I find that hard to believe!



When Hans heard about our fashion show he quickly scampered* downstairs to join the family as we gathered in the living room.

Mormor agreed to be the host of the show. She would describe our outfits just like they do on the fashion runway*.

“We now have the lovely Brigitta entering in her shimmering gold dress,” Mormor announced.

Brigitta then strolled into a roomful of applause.



Mormor pointed out the ruffles around the hem of Brigitta's dress, the bright, fuchsia-pink jacket with shiny buttons and her pretty shoes.

Brigitta twirled around and curtsied* to our enthusiastic audience.

“And our second model is Ginger, wearing her fabulous ruffled red dress, matching red shoes and a fancy headband.” Mormor continued.

I pranced* around the room and everyone applauded.

Dad said, “Wow, you girls are dressed to the nines.”

Brigitta and Hans looked at each other with a confused look on their faces.

“What does that mean?” asked Hans.

“It means you are dressed perfectly,” Dad explained.

Uncle Max commented that we could not have found any nicer outfits for the holidays.

Brigitta and I were really having fun hamming* it up while we pretended to be fashion



models.

Aunt Ingrid stood up and said “I’m sorry to put an end to such great entertainment but everyone needs to get ready because the Snowflake Ball begins in less than two hours.”



Mormor, Brigitta, Hans and I gathered up our snowflakes and scurried to Uncle Max’s car for our ride to the Art and Music Center.

We arrived twenty minutes before the festivities* were to begin. This gave us time to walk around the main entrance hall and see the interesting artwork and sculptures made by the students.

As we turned the corner to enter the Snowflake Ball I gasped, and we all stopped.

“Wow, this is unbelievable,” Dad said.

In front of us was a winter wonderland that Aunt Ingrid, Aunt Holly and my mom had helped create.

A long wall had been painted with a





winter sledding scene that looked real. We were very surprised to hear that Aunt Ingrid had painted it. She said it is called a “mural.”

Christmas trees, frosted in fake snow, were placed throughout the hall. Hung from the ceiling among strands of tiny white lights, snowflakes sparkled and silver foil icicles glistened.

We posed in front of the mural as a photographer snapped several photos of us.

People wandered around the room, going from table to table with holiday greetings. Everyone was dressed to the nines, as my dad would say! I was so glad I had gotten to wear my special holiday dress and take part in this magical family tradition.

Snow-white tablecloths covered the tables. Each had a gingerbread house in the center, decorated with white frosting and enough gumdrops and licorice sticks to fill a candy shop!

Lines of people gathered at the back of the



room to dip their cups into big bowls of bright red holiday punch. Large platters of fresh fruit and appetizers spilled onto the long tables.

As we continued to stroll about, a children's choir stood on the stage. Their soft voices soothed us as they sang Christmas carols.

We got so distracted* by everything that we almost forgot to place our snowflakes on the display tables.

More than a hundred snowflakes were entered into the contest. Some were made of paper. Many were made of recycled materials like shiny buttons, bits of fabric and old polished hardware.

We noticed the judges slowly walking around with clipboards, observing each snowflake carefully. They looked very serious.

Our plates were heaped with a variety of salads, fresh breads, delicious vegetable and fruit spreads and every kind of holiday food you could imagine.

The room was filled with anticipation



as everyone waited for the snowflake award ceremony to begin.

At last the judges began to announce all the special categories starting with “most festive.” After a few minutes they moved on to the “most interesting facts” category. The head judge gave the award for honorable mention and then she announced, “Our first place prize goes to Brigitta!”

“Hooray!” we whooped, while jumping up and down and hugging each other.

Many more winners were announced.

Soon one of the judges said it was time to present the “most beautiful snowflake” award.

“And the winner is....” He paused, and then said loudly, “Hans...for his “Cousin Ginger Snowflake.”

For a split second I thought it must be a joke. All I could do was sit there in disbelief with my mouth wide open!



Chapter Ten

HOLIDAY MAGIC

After all the awards were given out, we went up to the front of the ballroom where all the winners were displayed. There was the “Cousin Ginger Snowflake” with its big red first place ribbon.

“Isn’t it lovely?” Mormor asked, as I carefully picked it up for a closer look.

Hans was explaining to us how he came up with the idea. After Brigitta and I had made our first batch of cookies that was such a disaster, Hans was worried the dough was going to be thrown out.

“You both put so much work into that batch of cookies and I didn’t want to see it go to waste.”

He described how he had used cookie



cutters and small tools to shape it into a very fancy design. He added some old, broken costume* jewelry to give it sparkle, and let the dough harden.

As I gazed* at the gorgeous snowflake, I couldn't believe my eyes. My cousin Hans, who I thought didn't like me very much, had made the most spectacular snowflake *in the whole wide world* and named it after *me*!

I never pictured myself wrapping my arms around Hans to give him a big hug but that was just what I did—right in the middle of the Snowflake Ball!



The more I thought about everything the following morning, the more I realized that I had been wrong to feel uncomfortable about Hans. I looked at him in an entirely different way. No longer did I see him as the cousin who didn't want me there.

Just as I walked out into the hallway,



Aunt Holly was leaving her room.

“Ginger, are you ready to put all the final decorations on the tree today?” she asked.

“You bet I am,” I said.

This was the day to hang my glittering pink ball ornament with the striped ribbon from Mormor. It was the day to string popcorn and lingonberries. And it was the day to find a special place for “Nutmeg Gnome” on the tree.

We went to the kitchen to get some breakfast. Hans was sitting at the table.

“Hans, what a nice surprise! What are you doing here?” asked Aunt Holly.

“I’m just about finished with all my projects so I figured I’d have breakfast with you,” he said.

I wondered what kind of projects he was referring to. *Do they give out so much homework in Sweden that he has to spend his holiday time working?*

Oh well, at least he wasn’t ignoring us and he was actually eating breakfast with us.



This is a first! I thought.

Mom, Dad, Aunt Ingrid and Uncle Max were busy getting the food ready. Mormor loves to bake, so she had all the ingredients spread out to make mouthwatering cookies, just like at home.

“We can’t make our popcorn garlands without a cup of hot chocolate,” Aunt Holly said, looking at me with a big smile. She handed me a glass mug with pink and red hearts on it, full of delicious hot chocolate.

After we finished breakfast, we gathered the popcorn and berries and began stringing them. I was surprised how quickly Hans joined in. He was having a hard time threading his needle so I showed him how to do it.

Shortly after we started, Brigitta appeared.

“It sure does smell good in here,” she said as she pulled up a chair and began eating her usual open-faced sandwich for breakfast. When she finished, she enthusiastically started stringing the garlands.



All of a sudden I noticed something. I stood up and said, “Do you see what I see?”

We rushed to the window and gazed out at freshly falling snow. Aunt Holly described it as “enchanting.”

“Maybe it will be a white Christmas after all, just like in Chicago,” I said.

What fun! I thought. *It’s as if someone waved a magical holiday wand over me!*



Chapter Eleven

THE CHRISTMAS EVE VISITOR

“Hans, it’s cold outside. Why are you putting your shoes out there on the doorstep?” I asked, while trying not to laugh.

“Because it is a custom in Sweden to put shoes out on Christmas Eve. We always put ours outside on the doorstep. Last Christmas I found money and some small gifts in my shoes!” he answered excitedly.

“Everyone opens gifts on the night before Christmas in Sweden. An old legend is that *Jultomten*, a white-bearded gnome, brings gifts to the door on Christmas Eve. He is thought to live in the attic or under the floor in a home or a barn. Some think he lives in the forest,” he said.

Hans continued telling me all about



Jultomten. He comes carrying a huge sack, loaded with presents, on his back. The gifts are wrapped in brightly colored Christmas paper with amusing poems that give hints about what's inside the boxes.

After he told me this I was so excited. I could hardly wait until evening in hopes of a visit from *Jultomten*.



Uncle Max and Aunt Ingrid knew we would all enjoy a Christmas Eve smorgasbord.

“The three of you can help get it ready,” said Uncle Max.

Brigitta explained that a smorgasbord is a table full of a variety of foods.

Our smorgasbord included things I had never seen before, like pickled beets. There was an onion-and-potato casserole baking, and boy, did that smell delicious!

“Wow, I’ve never eaten anything like this,” I said.



“Here, try some pickled beets,” coaxed Brigitta, as she began spooning some onto a plate for me.

After she handed it to me I poked a fork into one of the slices.

“It smells like a pickle,” I commented. And then I popped the entire huge, juicy beet slice into my mouth.

Brigitta started to giggle.



“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“You have big purplish-red lips,” she laughed, as she pulled me over to a mirror to see.

We both began to cackle* hysterically.

“Where did Hans go?” I asked, as I tried to stop giggling. “He’s got to see this!”

Just then Hans walked in from the living room.

“I leave the room for one minute and you two have a giggle party!” he said smiling.

He then turned his head to look at me and let out a huge laugh.

“Golly, Ginger what did you do, stick your mouth in the bowl of pickled beets?”

“No, but I think I’ll have a few more if it’s OK,” I replied.

“Sounds like a good idea,” said Brigitta.

We all decided to sit down and enjoy a helping.

Since I love pickles, I enjoyed the beets. Not only did they taste good, it was fun to see



what purple beet juice would do to our lips and tongues!



We arranged the table for Christmas Eve and helped set out the food for the smorgasboard. Even though some of it tasted funny to me, it was interesting to try new and unusual things.

The cinnamon aroma of *risgrynsgröt* simmering on the stove flowed throughout the house. *Risgrynsgröt* was one thing I really enjoyed trying. It's a sweet, creamy rice porridge with one almond hidden in it. The person who finds the almond gets to make a wish.

I was so happy when I found the almond in my porridge. Since I never got my wish when we cracked our ginger cookies I now had a second chance to make up for it!

We were all chatting away while finishing our desserts. Suddenly, I jumped from my seat, startled to hear a loud knock on the door. Aunt



Ingrid hopped up to see who it was.

When she opened the door it was *Jultomten*. He yelled out, “Are there any good children here?” And then he tossed some boxes inside and ran away.

“My, my, look what we have here,” said Aunt Ingrid smiling.

He had left three boxes, which were all the same size. Each box was beautifully wrapped with a shiny red satin bow. One gift had a card on it for “Brigitta,” one for “Hans” and one for “Ginger.” Aunt Ingrid explained that each Christmas present was called a *julklapp* or Christmas box.

Aunt Ingrid handed me my box. I noticed there was something written on it and I began to read the words:

Take a journey along a trail
and float above the snow.
You're sure to glide and even sail
while traveling to and fro.



“Hmm,” I said.

And then Hans was given his box and read the note:

*Tracks in the snow are fun to see
with every step you take.
You'll stride among the fresh snowfall
and welcome each snowflake.*

“I wonder what it is,” he said, shaking it.

Next it was Brigitta's turn. She looked at me, and almost in a whisper, asked, “What in the world?” And then she read the message on her gift:

*You'll stay dry with every step,
no soggy socks or feet.
Put these on and go outside
for a walk that's a special treat.*

We all looked at one another with a big smile. With the speed of light, each of us ripped the wrapping paper off our gifts, and to



our surprise we had each received our own pair of snowshoes.

I squealed with excitement when I saw my beautiful pink snowshoes with striped straps.

Brigitta and Hans jumped up and down.

Mormor suggested that we try them out immediately. With our parents' approval, we ran upstairs to change out of our dressy outfits.

While I threw on my quilted vest, snow pants, boots and ski goggles, Brigitta quickly pulled on her coat and grabbed earmuffs, mittens and boots, stopping only to help Hans find his snow pants.

We all ran outside and scrambled to put our snowshoes on. They attached right to our boots with the bindings. It was a race to see who could make the first snowshoe print in the fresh fallen snow!

Snowshoeing is a great way to walk on deep snow without sinking. With a little bit of practice we soon got the hang of it. For more than an hour, we played outdoors wearing our snowshoes. I don't think I've ever had so much fun!





It was such an adventure to follow animal tracks in the snow by the light of the moon.

“Look over there!” I pointed. “Those tracks look like they were made by Mr. Snuggles!”

I followed the tracks with my eyes. In the snow, with whiskers twitching, was an adorable little brown bunny.

Brigitta and Hans ran over to the spot and the bunny quickly hopped away.

“Is that someone’s pet rabbit?” I asked in a worried voice.

“Oh no, that’s Little Bernie,” Brigitta told me. “We think that’s the wild bunny that hops across our yard every night.”

“C’mon!” Hans exclaimed. “Let’s go make our own tracks.”

As we glided and shuffled along, we twisted around to see what kinds of tracks we had made. Then we clomped down real hard to see how our tracks could change. It’s a night I’ll always remember.



Chapter Twelve

GINGER'S WISH

We didn't open all our presents on Christmas Eve. After all, this was a Swedish-American Christmas, so we saved some presents for Christmas day. We wanted to follow our American tradition, too.

I had brought some special gifts from home for Brigitta and Hans. On Christmas morning, I was just about ready to hand them out when Hans gave me the most beautifully decorated box with a glittery silver bow. There was something written on it:

*Something is inside
that's easy to chew,
but it's not for a human
so I'll give you a clue.*



When I opened it up I was surprised to see another wrapped box nested inside with a second poem attached:

*It's made from a willow tree
filled with dry hay,
and some twigs to munch
with some toys for play.*

*If you guessed a basket
you would be right,
since it's for a little guy
who is black and white.*

*Cheers to Mr. Snuggles,
he's such a lucky boy
to have the best friend in the whole wide world,
The Great Ginger from Chicago, Illinois!*

Inside the box was a woven-willow basket lined with hay. It was filled to the top with rabbit toys and dried fruit treats.

There is a Swedish tradition to put out a sheaf* of wheat on Christmas Eve for the animals, so Hans had placed one in the basket



for Mr. Snuggles. He had even fashioned each letter of Mr. Snuggles' name from apple tree twigs, which rabbits like to chew.

Then Brigitta handed me another box, wrapped in shiny silver-and-pink paper and tied with a sparkly bow. I excitedly read the poem that was on the card:

We didn't know how we'd feel
about your visit here.
We were a bit nervous
with a touch of fear.

Our wish was that you'd like us
and you'd feel right at home.
We placed our baskets on the tree
along with "Nutmeg Gnome."

Until there is another time
that we can be together,
we'll crack our cookies and make a wish
for our memories to last forever!

I opened the gift and inside was a heart basket that held handmade straw ornaments.



Separately wrapped in tissue paper were a heart and letters, made from twigs, that spelled out G-I-N-G-E-R.

“Wow, these are awesome!” I exclaimed.

“I collected twigs and made them myself,” Hans said proudly.

“Oh Hans, you put so much time and imagination into these presents,” I said, “and you’re so thoughtful.”

So that’s it! Now I get it, I said to myself. The reason Hans always shut his door and acted like he wanted to be alone was because he was busy making special gifts for Mr. Snuggles and me.

With a big smile on my face, I handed my presents to Hans and Brigitta.

I gave them each a stocking that I had helped embroider with their names. They were filled with holiday treats like ribbon candy and red-and-white peppermint candy canes.

I had picked out a bright blue scarf as a gift for Hans.



And for Brigitta, I had brought a snow globe with a scene of winter in Chicago.

When it was my turn to open up her gift to me I was so surprised to find it was also a snow globe—of *Jultomten*!

Brigitta stood up and declared, “I am so happy that the wish I made while cracking my



cookie has come true. My wish was for Ginger to become my close friend.”

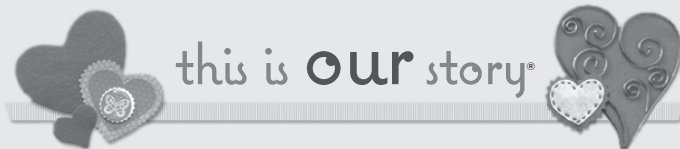
“And that’s almost the exact thing I wished for!” I chimed in. “But there was one other thing, and that was for Hans to be my close friend, too.”

The best Christmas present I received was the gift of friendship with my newfound cousins.

I never thought I would want to put off packing for our trip home. And I never thought the day would come when I really wouldn’t want to leave.

It was almost like having a home away from home! This Christmas was the best Christmas *in the whole wide world!*





We are an extraordinary generation of children.
And have we got a story to tell.

Our Generation® is unlike any that has come before. We're making a positive impact on our community by performing small, but powerful, acts of kindness, standing tall for causes we believe in, and creating a narrative where everyone can make a difference.

We're speaking up for those around us, taking leaps to develop big ideas, and embracing new opportunities without ever forgetting to build lasting memories along the way. From playing sports outdoors and learning new instruments, to singing out loud and dancing around, we're laughing together with friends as we share in the best moments of being a kid.

Our dreams have no limits, our voices echo around every corner, and we have the strongest belief that we can make anything and everything possible with our greatest gift: imagination.

This is our time. This is our story.

ourgeneration.com

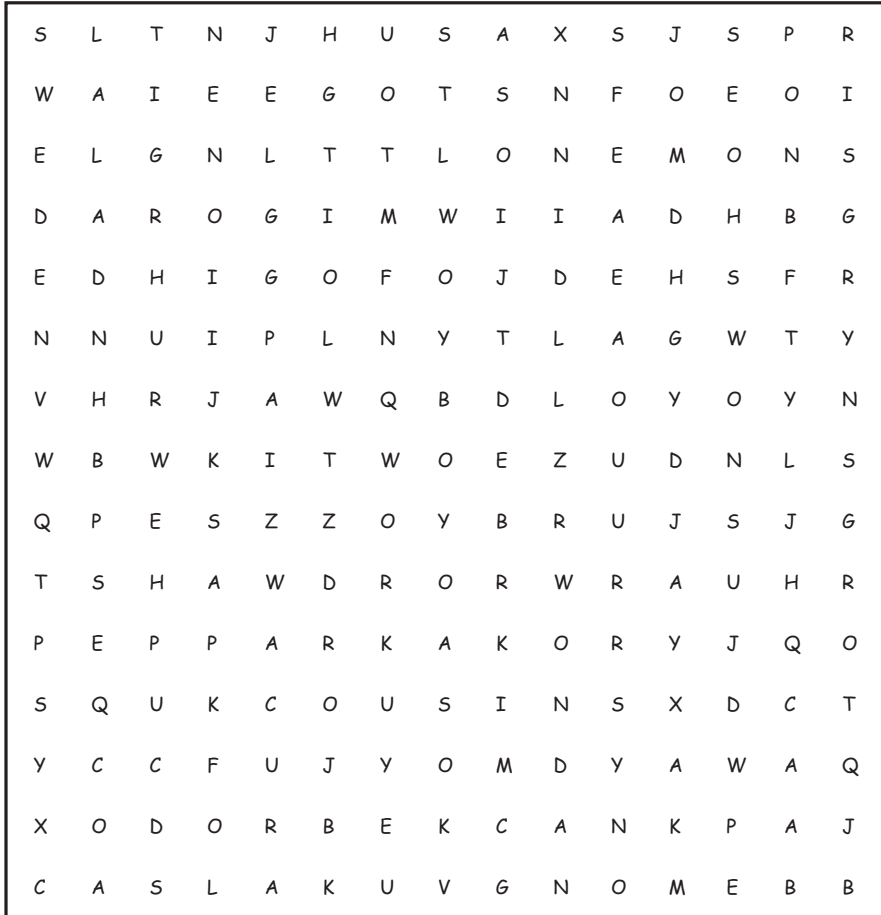
Ginger's Holiday Adventure

Ginger's travels were full of wonderful holiday fun, traditions and surprises! Now here's some fun for you—a list of hidden words from Ginger's adventure is below. Make a copy of the next page. Then find and circle the words from the list that are hidden in the grid. Here's a hint: the words go up, down, forward, backward and diagonal (from one corner to the other)! The solution is on page 107 (at the end of the Glossary). No peeking yet 😊

COUSINS
HANS
BRIGITTA
DALA
HOLIDAY
LINGONBERRY
SNOWFLAKES
WISHES
COCKADOODLEDOO
GNOME
JULTOMTEN
PEPPARKAKOR
SNOWSHOES
KNACKEBROD
RISGRYNSGROT
SWEDEN



Word Search



Glossary

*Many words have more than one meaning. Here are the definitions of words marked with this symbol * (an asterisk) as they are used in sentences.*

abandoning: *leaving something behind
with no plan to return*

ambitious: *wanting to do great things*

ancestors: *people who were in your
family a very long time ago*

anxious: *uneasy and worried*

blue: *sad*

broached, as in “broached the subject”:
brought up

bungalow: *a type of house with one
floor and a low roof*

bustling: *busy*

cackle: *noisy laugh*

citizen: *a person who lives in a city*

coincidental: *when two or more things
happen at the same time*

costume, as in “costume jewelry”:
not made of real gold or gems



curtsied: *bowed down by bending
the knees with one foot forward*

distracted: *unable to pay attention*

embroider: *decorate cloth with
a needle and thread*

enthusiastically: *excitedly*

festive: *merry*

festivities: *celebrations with lots
of activities*

frustration: *a feeling of irritation
and helplessness*

gazed: *looked thoughtfully*

generation: *the period of time between
the birth of parents and the birth
of their children*

hamming, as in “hamming it up”:
purposely acting in an exaggerated way

immigrated: *came to a new country to live*

index, as in “index finger”: *pointer finger*

mementos: *items that remind a person
of something*

panicked: *felt full of fear*



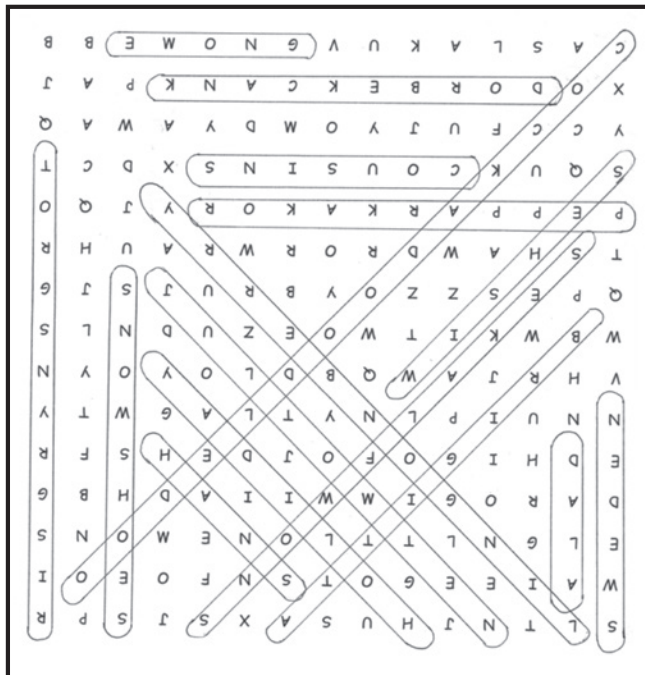
plotting: *secretly planning something*
pranced: *walked in a lively way*
reminiscing: *remembering things from the past*
reputation: *what people think about a person*
resented: *felt anger about something*
retreated: *backed away*
runway: *what models walk along
in fashion shows*
scampered: *ran*
sheaf: *a bundle of wheat or other
grain plants tied together*
shelter, as in “animal shelter”: *a place
where people help and protect
homeless animals, including lost pets*
souvenirs: *items kept as reminders
of a place that was visited*
standoffish: *unfriendly*
strolled: *walked slowly*
T, as in “to a T”: *exactly right*
tradition: *an event that has been done
for a long time and becomes
the usual thing to do*



trait: *a special quality that makes
a person different*

unison: *all together or at the same time*

Word Search Solution



[illegible]

[illegible]



About the Author

Cynthia (Cindy) Haigh, a mother and grandmother, lives in the Boston area. From the time she was a little girl she has cared deeply about animals and has been very involved with several animal protection groups. It was always difficult for her to hear all the stories of animals without homes, and over the years she and her family ended up adopting dozens of animals, from cats to rabbits. In fact, one of her rabbits, Little Bob, provided the inspiration for Ginger's rabbit, Mr. Snuggles.

She presently has two dogs, Petey and Larry, who were adopted from animal shelters. Thanks to them making friends with a teensy-weensy dog named Louie, also adopted from an animal shelter, she would go on walks with Louie's human buddy, Maggie, who grew up in Sweden. Some of Maggie's memories of her life in Sweden became part of Ginger's story.

This story also came to life because of all the wonderful people who contributed their creativity and vision, including Joe Battat, Dany Battat, Loredana Ramacieri, Karen Erlichman, Sandy Jacinto, Véronique Casavant, Véronique Chartrand, Jenny Gambino, Natalie Cohen, Lisa Armstrong, Joanne Burke Casey and Pam Shrimpton. Many thanks to Gisela Voss for the wonderfully creative concept she came up with.

*In addition to **Home Away from Home**, Cindy has written several other children's books including **The Marvelous Math Book**, **Hoppin' Healthy Harvesters**, **Busy Beaver Launderette**, **Sweep, Mop, Sparkle and Shine Specialists** and she co-authored **Bugz Bugz**. . .What's the buzz about bugs?*





this is OUR story®

Home Away from Home

Ginger™ can't wait for Christmas, her favorite time of year. Decorating the tree, baking and sharing her favorite cookies with her friends, and cuddling by the fire with her pet bunny, Mr. Snuggles, really puts her in the Christmas spirit. But this year, Christmas spirit is hard for Ginger to find. She and her family are flying thousands of miles across the Atlantic Ocean to visit relatives in Sweden, including cousins she has never met.

What will they be like? Are they going to have anything in common? Do they celebrate the same Christmas traditions? Will they understand how homesick she is and how much she misses Mr. Snuggles?

Ginger hits it off right away with her cousin Brigitta, but her younger cousin Hans is another matter. Why is he so standoffish? Is she only imagining that he seems to leave the room every time she enters? Does he think her visit is ruining his Christmas?

The Snowflake Ball offers a chance for Ginger to get a glimpse of what Hans is really like. During the ball, Ginger senses something is not what she thought it was. By the time her visit comes to an end, will Ginger's secret Christmas wish come true?

It's impossible to separate Our Generation® characters from the generation of girls who read about and play with them, for they are one and the same. They're changing the world by making their households greener. They're baking cupcakes to help charities. They're writing in their journals, practicing for recitals, doing cartwheels down the block and giggling with their friends until they can hardly breathe. Our Generation is about girls growing up together. "This is our story" reflects the community of these amazing girls as they laugh, learn and create the narrative of their own generation.

Ages 7 and up

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