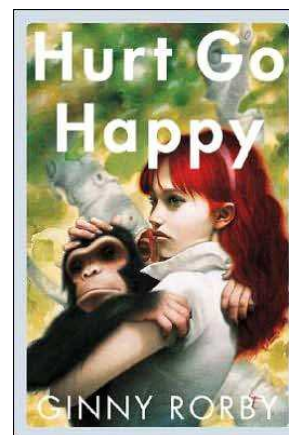


## YHBA NOVEL RESOURCES

### *HURT GO HAPPY* BY GINNY RORBY

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#### About the Author

- \* Ginny Rorby's website: <http://www.ginnyrorby.com>
- \* Until the publication of *Hurt Go Happy*, author Ginny Rorby was an unheard of writer. Her experiences in writing and the events that led her to write this story are actually a story all their own. At the age of fifteen, Rorby worked at a daycare in Winter Park, Florida, and she felt a strong attachment to three-year old Belinda. This small child clung to Rorby day after day, and the frightening evidence of the physical abuse Belinda suffered at her mother's hand haunted Rorby for years to come. Fast forward a few years, and Rorby is well into her career as a flight attendant for Pan American and simultaneously taking classes to earn her biology degree from the University of Miami. With future hopes of entering a veterinary school, Rorby had a natural interest in helping an abused dog that a friend of hers found on the side of the road, left to die—another event that haunted Rorby. It was at this point that she turned to writing, with the sole intent of getting her feelings of anger and frustration out. She wrote a letter to the people who had hurt, neglected, and abused that poor dog, even though she didn't know their names. Rorby held on to that letter for a year before it got into the hands of a writer at a local newspaper who was incredibly impressed with her writing abilities. Nevertheless, Rorby turned down the encouragement to write with a serious intent but did enroll in a Creative Writing class, which led her to a not-so surprising conclusion: her times of the most descriptive, focused, and influential writing was when that writing was centered around neglected children and animals. In 1985, Rorby graduated with double majors in Biology and English. Little did she know that a newspaper she'd read three years later would catapult her from flight attendant to author. While on a layover, she picked up a local newspaper and read a cover page article on the recent successes of Jane Goodall; in the same stroke, she read another cover page article about Lucy, a chimpanzee who was being raised as a human and taught to communicate with humans using ASL, or American Sign Language. Connect these two news articles, the

young and abused Belinda, and a close-to death abandoned dog, and you have the inspiration for the powerfully moving *Hurt Go Happy*.

- \* Books written by Ginny Rorby: *Dolphin Sky*, *Hurt Go Happy*
- \* Awards for Ginny Rorby's writings: Awards have been received only for *Hurt Go Happy* (see below).
- \* Awards for *Hurt Go Happy*: finalist for the Sunshine State Young Readers Award 2009, Scholastic Bookfair selection for the Top 100 books to read and share by the New York Public Library system, finalist for the Missouri Association of School Libraries Truman Reading Award, KLIATT Editor's Choice Best of the Year's Hardcover Fiction Title for 2006, International Reading Association's 2007 Teacher's Choice Selection, and the Schneider Family Book Award

### Annotation

It took Ginny Rorby ten years to write *Hurt Go Happy*, but young adults will undoubtedly be reading this moving book for many years to come. Even though the book begins its story in California in 1991, the writing has that timeless, always-current feel to it. Joey Willis, short for Joanne, has been deaf since the age of six, and now, as a ripe thirteen-year old, she is getting fed up with so many things. Ruth, Joey's mother, refuses to let her daughter learn American Sign Language, or ASL, for reasons that she won't even talk about. Instead, Joey must rely upon her somewhat-understandable voice and reading her mother's lips. Her own step-father Ray is passive and her two-year old brother Luke is uncooperative, leaving her to communicate solely with her mother at home.

One day in February while on a walk through the woods, Joey crosses paths with the old, feeble, and experienced Dr. Charlie Mansell, who, after some convincing, leads a suspicious Joey to his nearby home to meet Sukari (pronounced sue-car-ee). The doctor and his wife rescued this young chimpanzee from poachers in Africa, and the details of this story may be too much for some younger or more sensitive readers. Seeing how Sukari communicates with Charlie through sign language, Joey and Sukari become fast friends, and Charlie starts to show Joey a few signs. Knowing the wrath that will ensue if her mother finds out, Joey hides her new friendships from her family and goes to see Charlie and Sukari on the sly. This decision of Joey's to hide things from her mother is perhaps not the best model for readers.

However, it doesn't take long for Charlie, who has become a grandfather-figure for Joey, to learn of Ruth's refusal to accept her daughter's deafness and let her learn ASL. His temper and frustration rise, and he confronts Joey's mother and step-father about this subject. In contrast, Charlie's open and honest

method of confrontation is a good example for readers to experience. Ruth slowly yet hesitantly opens up to her daughter's new friendships, but the reader is told only bits and pieces of why she is against signing.

The plot thickens with the occurrence of an earthquake that causes Charlie's death. Sukari is sent to live with Charlie's niece, and Joey is left behind to grieve. Time doesn't heal, yet it passes, and Joey's parents agree to let her start her freshman year attending a deaf school, something completely funded through Charlie's will. Through a twist and turn of events, Sukari is sent to a medical research lab in New Mexico—a dire fate, no doubt. Joey finds out that her mother has tried again to protect her, but again it has backfired—Charlie's will also named Joey the sole guardian of Sukari. With the help of Charlie's lawyer, Joey takes things into her own hands, again hiding things from her mother, and treks to free Sukari. What she finds at the medical research laboratory can be difficult to read, especially for younger or sensitive readers. Joey and Sukari are once again reunited, and they journey to a conservation center in Florida that will provide the chimp with the home and care that she deserves. In the meantime, Joey's mother opens up to her, accepting who her daughter has become and confronting demons from the past. A college-aged Joey is forced to say a final good-bye to Sukari upon her death from cancer, a side effect from the medical research testing.

Rorby's writing is realistic and filled with complex and believable characters. Because these characters appear so true-to life, there are a few utterances of inappropriate words, which might be a turn-off for some parents or teachers. There is also the mention and sparse detailing of animal research/abuse and the physical abuse Joey and her mother received many years ago, so parents and teachers should be familiar with the reader's background when recommending this novel. The writing in this book is superb, even for an inexperienced writer as Rorby, and readers will not be able to turn the pages fast enough. Above all else, *Hurt Go Happy* teaches responsibility for our words, our actions, and our choices, and responsibility to our family, our friends, and the animals living with us upon this earth.

Genre - Realistic Fiction

Point of View - Third Person Limited Omniscient

Themes - responsibility, disability, animals, pain, bravery, friendship

Importance of the Title

The significance of the title *Hurt Go Happy* is not revealed to the reader until closer to the end of the book. Joey travels to New Mexico to free Sukari of her containment in a research laboratory, and upon recognizing Joey, the chimp signs "Hurt Go. Happy." Even though she's an animal, Sukari realizes that Joey's

presence itself signals and end to the hurt, pain, and neglect she's been receiving at the lab, and that she can once again be happy. It doesn't take long for the reader to connect the meaning of this title to Joey as well; the time for her hurting is over, and she can once again be happy.

### Conflict

Several layers and degrees of conflict exist in *Hurt Go Happy*, but all are centered around Joey and her mother.

- \* Joey struggles with being deaf and a mother who refuses to let her daughter learn American Sign Language.
- \* Joey struggles with the memories of her childhood where her father physically abused her and her mother.
- \* Joey struggles with having a step-father whom she knows nothing about.
- \* Joey struggles with not having any friends at school, being bullied at school, and getting poor grades in school.
- \* Joey struggles with convincing her mom to let her attend a deaf school.
- \* Joey struggles with the death of Dr. Mansell.
- \* Joey struggles with having to say good-bye to Sukari, time and time again.
- \* Ruth (Joey's mother) struggles with her daughter's deafness, understanding that disability, and wanting her to appear normal.
- \* Ruth struggles with treating both of her children fairly and not showing favoritism.
- \* Ruth struggles with leaving the past in the past and not being haunted by her abusive ex-husband.
- \* Ruth struggles with the friendship between Joey and Dr. Mansell and Sukari.

### Conflict Resolution

The inter-connected conflicts present in this story are resolved only because of the dynamic characters that change immensely by the time the last page has been turned. Joey has her arms open wide to solving her problems. Quite honestly, all her struggles begin to be solved at the end of Chapter 1 when she meets Charlie and Sukari—they alone, together, are the best things for her. Ruth, on the other hand, is extremely resistant to confronting the skeletons in her closet. The resolution of her struggles is obtained again through the influences of Charlie and Sukari, not to mention a very persistent and head-strong daughter.

### Characters

- \* Joey (Joanne Elizabeth Willis) is a thirteen-year old seventh grader with flaming auburn hair. She has been deaf since the age of six, a result of child abuse received from her birth father. She is sensitive to the bullying of

others at school yet is very head-strong in fighting for herself outside of school.

- ✧ Ray is Joey's step-father. He is uneducated and works as a logger for a milling company. He is a complex character, undergoing major changes and becoming more involved and personal with his step-daughter.
- ✧ Smiley is Joey's nickname for the nurse who cared for Joey in the hospital after receiving the life-changing injuries from her father. She received her nickname because of the yellow smiley-faced button she always wore on her shirt. She was loving and compassionate toward Joey and gave her a Sesame Street sign language book.
- ✧ Luke is Joey's two-year old brother. He is energetic, spunky, and fun-loving. He receives more attention from their parents than Joey does.
- ✧ Ruth is Joey's mother. She moved to Fort Bragg from Reno to escape her abusive ex-husband and was then homeless for a while. She works as a waitress at a local restaurant. Because she forces her deaf daughter to read lips, she is her daughter's lifeline to the rest of the world.
- ✧ Sukari is a young chimpanzee from Africa whose mother was killed by poachers for meat. She is rescued by Dr. Mansell and his wife and taken to live with them in California where she is taught ASL. Her name means "sugar" in Swahili, which is a spin-off of "sugar-butt," for the fine white hairs on her butt that young chimps have.
- ✧ Hidey is Sukari's cat, given that name because she always hid from Sukari. She is Sukari's playmate and source of comfort.
- ✧ Dr. Charles Mansell (Charlie) is a retired doctor who lives nearby Joey's house. Both of his parents were deaf, and he grew up communicating with them through ASL. He rescued Sakari from the dangers in Africa and is very passionate about animals, naturally against animal research laboratories. Sukari's nickname for Charlie is "Turtle" because he moves so slow.
- ✧ Roxy is the closest thing that Joey had as a friend in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. She is a new student, a self-described "live-wire", will say and do just about anything, and very intolerant of her own deaf mother.
- ✧ Mrs. Gomez is Luke's Hispanic babysitter. She teaches Luke some Spanish words and lives across the street from the restaurant where Ruth works.
- ✧ Kenny is one of Joey's classmates who seems to have a crush on her. He does give her attention that almost no one else does at school and is very thoughtful towards her.
- ✧ Brad is Roxy's boyfriend and is mean to others who are different from the norm.

- \* Dillon is a classmate of Joey's.
- \* Kristin is a classmate of Joey's who is more concerned about herself than anyone else.
- \* Harley is an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at Joey's school who is confined to a wheelchair because of his cerebral palsy. Harley is actually the nickname the other mean students have given him because of his "set of wheels". He is bullied because of his disability.
- \* Mrs. Rowe is Joey's English teacher. She does not understand what Joey needs from a teacher because of her deafness, but Mrs. Rowe is kind to Joey.
- \* Cindee is a classmate of Joey's.
- \* Jason is a classmate of Joey's who occasionally picks on her.
- \* Mr. Cary is Joey's biology teacher who somewhat understands the adjustments she needs because of her deafness.
- \* Lynn is Charlie's blonde thirty-something niece who works in Fresno as a doctor in obstetrics. She is kind and loving toward everyone, but her ultimate duties lie with her family.
- \* Martha Alexander teaches an ASL class at a community college. Joey enrolls in this class at her mother's discretion.
- \* Gilbert is a goose that Ray found trying unsuccessful to hatch from an egg. Joey, Luke, and Sukari cared for Gilbert and raised it until it became an adult goose.
- \* Jack is the man that Lynn eventually marries. He is a cardiologist.
- \* Bryan McCully is Charlie's lawyer. He seems to have some impressive connections and can make just about anything happen for Joey.
- \* Ron Nadeau is a neighbor of Joey's and attends the annual neighborhood campfire.
- \* Gregory Smith is a neighbor of Joey's and attends the annual neighborhood campfire.
- \* Katherine is Gregory Smith's sister and attends the annual neighborhood campfire.
- \* Lyle Nadeau is a neighbor of Joey's and attends the annual neighborhood campfire.
- \* Bridgetta works at the Deaf School where Joey attends starting her freshman year of high school. She takes Joey and Ruth on a tour around the campus. She is a petite and pretty woman who is also pregnant and deaf.
- \* Tanya also works at the Deaf School and is Bridgetta's interpreter. She is also pretty but very tall.

- \* Sarah is a student at the Deaf School and first meets Joey at a restaurant. She is kind to Joey.
- \* Mr. Henderson is one of Joey's teachers at the Deaf School.
- \* Mr. Jacobs is one of Joey's teachers at the Deaf School.
- \* Michelle is Joey's roommate at the Deaf School. She is boy-crazy and not responsible enough to babysit her own younger sister on the weekends, so Joey does it.
- \* Pam Rowland is the director of the Center for Great Ape Conservation in Miami, Florida. She is very loving and compassionate toward the animals she works with, and she accommodates Joey's needs by agreeing to keep Sukari. She is sympathetic and caring toward Joey.
- \* Dolores Miller is a friend of Bryan McCully as well as a fellow lawyer. She picks up Joey and helps her to rescue Sukari, an event that changes her.
- \* Kathy Lawson is an ASL interpreter who accompanies Dolores Miller in picking up Joey and rescuing Sukari, and who is also changed by this event.
- \* Dr. Fredrick Clarke is director of the Clarke Foundation in New Mexico, the most notorious animal research lab in the nation. He is very unkind and hateful.
- \* Joanne is a flight attendant who knows some ASL. She helps out Joey during her flight to Miami with Sukari.
- \* Noelle and Kenya are chimpanzees who live with Sukari at the Center for Great Ape Conservation.

### Setting

*Hurt Go Happy* opens in Fort Bragg, California, in 1991, and skips around a few different locations in that state. A couple of scenes in the middle of the book take place on the way from California to New Mexico before ending in Miami, Florida, in 1997.

### Interest Level and Reading Level

- \* IL = ages 10-14
- \* RL = 5.2

### Book Talk

Before doing the book talk, I would have someone videotape me saying a few short sentences (the content really isn't significant here). For the first part of the book talk, I would show my students the video but without any sound, seeing how many words they can decipher simply by reading my lips. It may be necessary to show the video clip a few times for this. Then, I would show my students a magazine article/pictures/a video clip of Lucy, the first chimpanzee who was taught to live as a human and taught to communicate through ASL. Next, I would say, "*Hurt Go*

*Happy* is a book where the lives of a deaf lip-reading girl and a chimpanzee who uses sign language collide. Together, they face the dangers of an earthquake, death, an animal research laboratory, a mean mother, and raisins. How do these events connect? How do the characters change by the end of the book? Once you start this action-packed page turner, you won't be able to put it down, and you'll remember it's story for years to come."

### Spelling and Vocabulary Words

- \* vaguely (pg. 10) - not clearly and briefly
- \* lulled (pg. 10) - led to believe something not true
- \* phantoms (pg. 12) - haunting memories from the past
- \* chanterelles (pg. 16) - edible mushrooms
- \* intuitive (pg. 16) - knowing something instinctively (naturally)
- \* girdled (pg. 17) - wrapped around
- \* auburn (pg. 24) - reddish in color
- \* meningitis (pg. 32) - a sickness that occurs when the brain and spinal cord are inflamed
- \* gnarled (pg. 33) - bent and twisted
- \* thicket (pg. 33) - a thick growth of bushes
- \* resentment (pg. 50) - holding a grudge against someone for something
- \* indignant (pg. 52) - angry and resentful
- \* fester (pg. 104) - to slowly form irritation
- \* fury (pg. 104) - anger
- \* pity (pg. 106) - feeling sorry for someone or something
- \* Mercurochrome (pg. 120) - a brand of antiseptic used in hospitals
- \* domestic (pg. 128) - tame, not wild
- \* unenthusiastically (pg. 129) - without much feeling or emotion
- \* melancholy (pg. 155) - sad and gloomy
- \* intensive (pg. 159) - covering a lot of material in a short amount of time
- \* integrated (pg. 163) - included, involved, and a part of something
- \* wallowed (pg. 163) - to immerse in
- \* aimlessly (pg. 192) - without a purpose or a goal
- \* unflinching (pg. 218) - not moving
- \* cliché (pg. 242) - an over-used phrase that expresses common thoughts or feelings; example: teach an old dog new tricks = to teach a person who's been around for a while something new
- \* pristine (pg. 254) - pure and unspoiled
- \* deceptively (pg. 255) - not telling the truth
- \* pallor (pg. 255) - paleness

## Indiana Academic Standards Met by Novel Content

- ✱ English and Language Arts
  - 6.1.1, 6.1.2, 6.1.4, 6.2.8, 6.3.2, 6.3.3, 6.3.6, 6.3.8, 6.3.9
  - 7.1.3, 7.3.2, 7.3.3, 7.3.4, 7.3.8, 7.3.9
  - 8.1.3, 8.3.2, 8.3.4, 8.3.9

## Anticipation Statements

- ✱ Having a physical disability means that you cannot live a normal life.
- ✱ Animals can be therapeutic and beneficial for humans.
- ✱ Bad things that happen to you will haunt you forever.
- ✱ It is okay to use animals that aren't endangered for research purposes.

## Read Aloud Passages

- ✱ Chapter 1, Page 11, the third and fourth paragraph (which continues and finishes on page 12) - Joey explains the sounds she fondly remembers before she was deaf and remembers the nurse from the hospital who told her what deafness would be like.
- ✱ Chapter 2, Page 22, the first complete paragraph to the seventh paragraph on page 23 - Joey has just met Charlie and is introduced to Sukari
  - The first read-aloud passage gives readers a little bit of insight into Joey's deafness, what it must be like for her, but it avoids telling the reader straight-out why she is deaf in the first place, which leaves them wanting to know more. The second read-aloud passage where Joey meets Charlie and then Sukari is clearly written, incredibly interesting, and humorous. Readers get a perfect picture in their minds of this scene and are left intrigued, wanting to know what happens next between Joey and Sukari.