

HONEY CAKE

By Joan Betty Stuchner

Random House

AJL Newsletter; circ: n/a

February/March 2008

Stuchner, Joan Betty. *Honey Cake*. Illus. by Cynthia Nugent. A Stepping Stone Book. New York: Random House, 2008. 101pp. \$11.99. ISBN: 978-0-375-85189-6. (Canadian and British edition published by Tradewind Books, Vancouver. ISBN: 978-1-89658-037-1). Grade 3 – 5.

Sometimes when you open a book, the look and feel of it is just right, like a finely-tailored garment. Such a book is *Honey Cake*. With its sepia cover, rough-trimmed pages, and old-fashioned font, this novel resonates of a time past—in this case, of German-occupied Denmark in the 1940s. The well-placed line drawings enhance the text, so generous they make *Honey Cake* feel almost like a graphic novel.

The story is told in the first person by David Nathan, a ten-year-old Jewish boy living in Copenhagen. The other main characters are his older sister Rachel, his best friend Elsa, as well as decent, likeable adults—his teacher, parents, and the king—who are drawn with sensitivity and humor.

The novel is staged like a movie—present time (1943), flashback to the past (1940), present time (1943). Although this change of time is somewhat confusing, the titles at the beginning of each chapter help to keep the framework of the story clear. A fast-paced story, based on real events, *Honey Cake* builds suspense until the final scene—the family's escape to Sweden. Two letters written by David and Elsa serve as an authentic dénouement. An afterword by the author places the fictional events into historical context; a recipe for honey cake is a delicious bonus.

Honey Cake would serve as a fine introduction to the story of the German occupation of Denmark. Highly recommended for school, synagogue, and public libraries.