

# The Summer the Great Winds Came

By Jenna Shoosmith

In the summer that I was born, a fantastic natural phenomenon rolled through our small town of Fort Hemingway, Virginia and captured the attention of meteorologists from all around the globe. I was too young to remember it, but I've heard quite a few stories over the years about what happened when the Great Winds came.

Old Mr. Brady down on Second Street said that he could tell - don't ask how, but he could just *sense* - when the Winds were coming. He could stand out on his front porch, and *feel* the omniscient pressure building beyond the horizon.

In the minutes before a storm, our town would be blanketed in silence. The birds would stop singing, screen doors would stop slamming, and even the yappiest dogs would suddenly be hushed into submission. The streets would drain of life. Our little town of Fort Hemingway would take in one last gasp of air before the overwhelming wind pulled it under.

These Winds were spontaneous and random and would come to visit every week or so throughout that entire summer. Century-old trees would be uprooted; windows would be broken, roofs torn off. Mailboxes would be ripped from manicured front lawns and planted halfway across town in someone's chimney. Garden gnomes would go missing, presumably swept away and tucked into the branches of a tree. The amount of damage the Winds inflicted was astounding; it would take several days for everyone to clean up the mess that was left behind, and by that time, old Mr. Brady down on First would already have a premonition about the next storm. The Great Winds continued their assault of our town until about mid-September, when they suddenly stopped. We went an entire week without a single storm, then two weeks, then three. One afternoon Mr. Brady stepped out on his front porch, with his hands dug deeply into his pockets, looked, squinting at the sky, nodded, and proclaimed, "Its done blown itself out."

Most people, being sane and right in the head, would cheer and cry out at this news. However, the folks of Fort Hemingway didn't quite feel that way. You see, for all the belongings that were swept away, the Winds brought people the things they truly needed. After each storm, folks would find curious objects sitting in their backyards or on their porches: hats, bicycles, children's toys. One woman said that she found her lost wedding ring under one of the tomato plants in her vegetable garden. Mr. Gelman, who wore the same pair of shoes every day for five

years straight, found a new pair hanging from the elm tree in his backyard. Mrs. Mendel desperately needed a pie-pan because her old one had been stolen and used as a Frisbee. But after a wind passed through, she found a new one taking a nap and basking in the summer sun on her front porch.

These Winds, as terrible and frightening as they were, swept the inhabitants of Fort Hemingway off their feet. Neighboring towns and cities reported average summer conditions that year. No one could explain this natural phenomenon and even the cleverest of scientists couldn't present a valid reason. No one knew where our Winds originated or why they rolled through our town, but most people would point in the direction of the Atlantic Ocean and say: "Come from that way."

As for me, well, I was far too young to remember; you must recall that the Winds came in the summer that I was born. However, Ma takes great pleasure in telling the story of my birth and how I was blown in from across the sea. During one particular storm, as Ma sat in the living room and waited for the wind to die down, I came shooting down the chimney, covered in soot, and landed right into her life. Now, I'm not one to always believe in such tall tales, but given the choice between a simple anecdote and a story blown way out of proportion, I have always chosen the latter.

And perhaps that has made all the difference.