

When 11-year-old Skate Tate comes home from school, she finds that her Great-Uncle Mort, whose nickname is GUM, has come for a visit. Read the story to learn more about GUM's visit with Skate and her family. Then answer the questions that follow.

from **UNITED
TATES of
AMERICA**

by Paula Danziger

1 Opening the front door to my house, I call out, "Mom. I'm home."

2 She calls back, "In the kitchen. Hurry up. I have a surprise for you."

3 I rush into the kitchen, wondering what the surprise is.

4 Maybe she's made my favorite dessert, chocolate cheesecake.

5 I enter the kitchen.

6 It's not chocolate cheesecake.

7 It's even better.

8 In the chair, across from my mom, is one of my favorite people in the whole entire world.

9 I say what I always say when I see him sitting down, "Watch out, there's GUM on the chair."

10 "Okay kiddo. Skate on over here." He says what he always says when he first sees me. "Give your old Great-Uncle Mort a big hug."

11 Then I rush over to him.

12 I say, "You're not *so* old. If you were, we'd have to call you O'GUM . . . and we don't."

13 I look at GUM.

14 He's fifty-seven years old . . . that's not old-old . . . not ancient old. He was twenty years old when my dad, his nephew, was born.

15 I hug him and ask at the same time, "When did you get here? How long are you staying? Where are you going next? Do you think you can stay here for a while?"

16 He laughs. "Slow down . . . enough questions for a minute . . . and you forgot an important one . . . one that you always asked first, when you were little."

17 I grin at him.

18 "Ask." He grins back.

19 I know which question he is talking about but now that I am older, I don't ask this anymore even though I do think it.

20 "Ask," he says. "It's okay."

21 I look at my mother, who taught us not to ask.

22 She grins, shrugs, and says, "With GUM, the rules are different. You can ask."

23 "What did you bring me? What did you bring me?" I clap my hands and jump up and down. "What did you bring me?"

24 Once I start asking, it's hard to stop.

25 GUM goes over to a suitcase, opens it up, and pulls out a large package with my name on it. "Gifts from India."

26 The package is filled with lots of smaller packages.

27 I open one.

28 Paper . . . it's absolutely amazing. It looks like there are things in it. I touch it, smile, and think about how I'm going to use it in my artwork.

29 "It's all handmade," GUM tells me. "I visited the factory. They add things like flowers, onion skin, garlic, and fabric."

30 I open a bag filled with squares of fabric . . . silks and suedes and beautiful patterns. "Oh, GUM . . . this is wonderful! I love it. Thank you."

31 "I thought you could use it in your scrapbooks," GUM says.

32 I smile at him. I'm smiling so much that it feels like my face is going to break.

33 GUM is always interested in my artwork.

34 I remember when I was in second grade and making Popsicle stick log cabins.

35 GUM and I must have eaten a gazillion pops until we realized that craft
stores sold the sticks without the ices.

36 My Popsicle stick village was very colorful.

37 I open another package.

38 “Oh, GUM . . . these are beautiful. What are they?”

39 “They’re called *bindis*.” He explains, “Indian women wear them on their
foreheads.”

40 *Bindis* . . . tiny little dots and other shapes . . . all different kinds . . .
material, jewels, plastic, a mixture of all three . . . I just love them.

41 I open another package . . . bracelets . . . large and small.

42 I hold up one of the tiny ones. “Too large for a ring . . . too small for a
bracelet.”

43 GUM and I look at each other and say at the same time, “Picture frames.”

44 I pass them over to my mom to look at and she says, “GUM gave some to
me, too. I’m going to use them as napkin rings.”

45 Another package to open . . . and it’s beautiful material.

46 GUM says, “It’s an Indian sari, a dress.”

47 “Who’s sari now?” My mom sings an old song that she likes, “Who’s
Sorry Now.”

48 GUM and I groan and cover our ears.

49 GUM grins at me. “The D.F. not only has the family habit of punning . . .
she has the family habit of not being able to sing on key.”

50 GUM calls Mom The D.F., the Delicate Flower, because she doesn’t like
to rough it, to camp out when we travel.

51 I open the last package.

52 Art books from India . . . the work is so beautiful.

53 I just keep smiling at GUM, who keeps smiling back.

54 I am so happy.

55 Even if GUM had arrived with no gifts, I would still be so happy.

56 Being with GUM is the best gift of all.