



Cloud of Witnesses

by Jane Hertenstein

*“The stars and black sky closed over me.
I was not Pip with the hope of great expectations,
just an eighth grader looking for a lucky break.”*

Roland Tanner is looking for a benefactor, someone to rescue him from his family, the sorriest characters he’s ever met: a sister who works at the Curl Up and Dye salon, a brother who takes motors apart in their front yard, a grandmother who flashes him the evil eye from her ragged vinyl armchair, and a father who keeps him at arm’s length. Tested as gifted, Roland gets bused from his poor, rural home to the middle school in town, where his new classmates only see him as a hillbilly.

He is desperate to reach out beyond the power lines that crisscross the hills surrounding the family’s trailer in southeastern Ohio. Yet he’s afraid to step outside of himself to ask Patty to the dance, to stand up for his Muslim friend Hassan, to see that his father loves him. It’s only when he realizes he’s in charge of his destiny that Roland accepts the cloud of witnesses, the saints and sinners all around him—that his future is whatever he makes it.

A quiet, humorous book about coming of age in the foothills of the Appalachians

Themes include being an outsider, acceptance and friendship across cultural lines, family life, grief, loyalty in adversity, bravery in the face of defeat, empathy, overcoming bullying, spirituality, Muslims, biased news coverage

Explores the qualities of a hero in his/her journey toward self-discovery

About the Author

Jane Hertenstein is a prolific author of fiction and creative non-fiction for adults and children. She enjoys long-distance bike touring, waking up early to work, running along the lakefront, and working with the homeless on the streets of Chicago. Her latest book, *Cloud of Witnesses*, is based on her experiences substitute teaching in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in southern Ohio.



Protagonist: Roland, 13-14 year-old 8th grader

Secondary characters: Patty, a smart, sassy, independent girl; Hussein, an Iranian transfer student

Setting: Rural Ohio during the Iranian hostage crisis (1979-1980)

Author: Jane Hertenstein

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