

'The Ambassador of Nowhere Texas'

By **Lisa Britton**
Go! Magazine

I know I shouldn't judge a book by the cover.

But covers are becoming more colorful and creative every day, and I admit that it's often the cover art that draws me to a book.

Especially in the kids section of the Baker County Public Library.

That's where I found the 2021 novel "The Ambassador of Nowhere Texas" by Kimberly Willis Holt.

Aside from the cover, it was the dedication that grabbed me: "To the children of 9/11."

At that same time my son Max, who's 10, was reading "Ground Zero" by Alan Gratz, so we'd been talking about the events of Sept. 11, 2001.

"The Ambassador of Nowhere Texas" follows the story of Rylee, who is about to start seventh grade in Antler, Texas, in the fall of 2001. Her best friend, Twig, is on vacation in Spain and won't be there for

the first few weeks of school.

Anyone who has faced starting a new school without their best friend can probably identify with how Rylee was feeling. But she survives the first few weeks, and anticipates the return of her friend.

Then Sept. 11 dawns. She's sitting in her first class when all the teachers are called to the office. Her teacher returns, and tells the class that planes had hit the World Trade Center Towers in New York. Then she turns on the TV.

As Rylee describes what she saw, I couldn't help but remember where I was that day, watching the scenes play out on television. I was a senior at Boise State University, and I sat in silence with my roommate as we watched the news coverage.

Twig comes home days late, delayed by the cancellations of flights and increased security. She seems changed somehow, and soon the two girls drift apart.

Rylee finds herself mourning the lost friendship and trying to

find her place in life without her best friend.

Then Joe moves in next door with his mom.

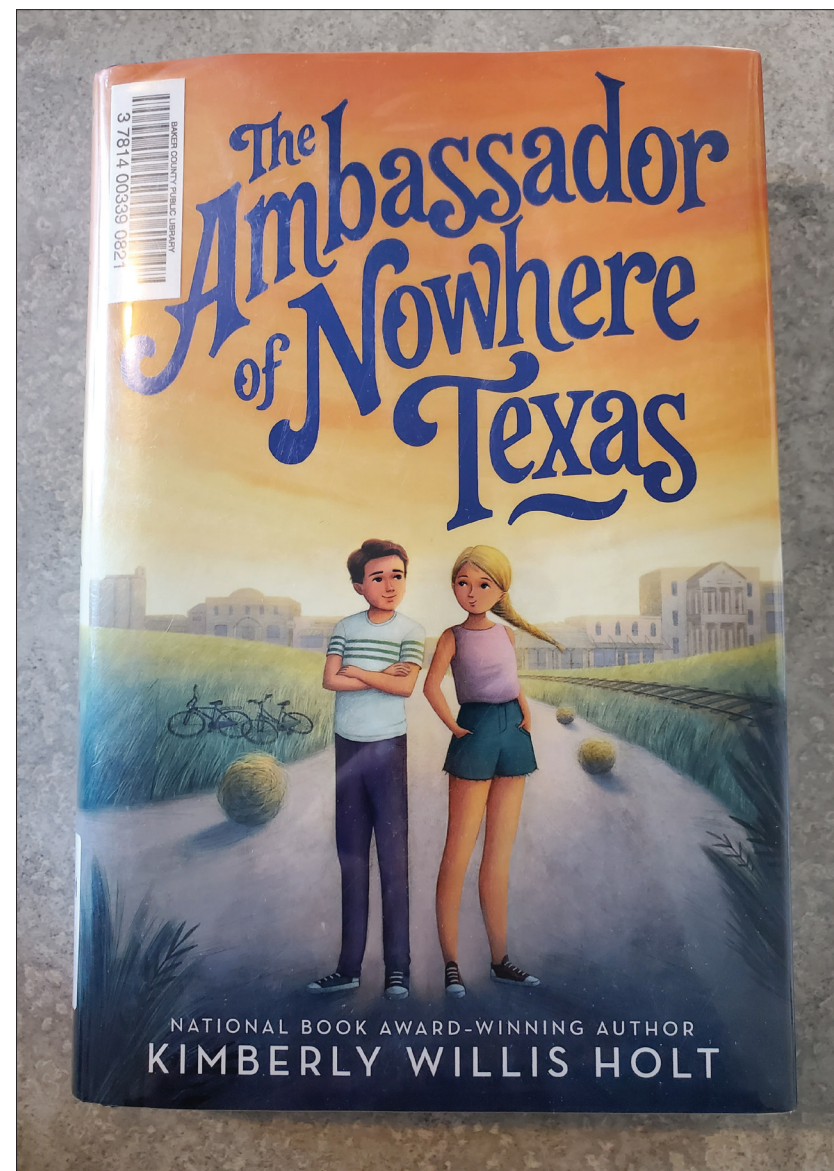
He's not impressed with this small Texas town that he calls Nowhere, but Rylee is determined to make him see its good points by being a tour guide.

It takes awhile, but Rylee learns that Joe and his mom moved from New York City just after 9/11. And she finds out why his dad, a firefighter, didn't come with them.

Let me pause here to say I don't remember crying over books when I was a kid. Maybe it's because 9/11 is still so fresh, even 20 years later, but this story made me cry. Multiple times.

It is a sweet story of navigating childhood and friendships, all in the midst of a very real chapter in our nation's history.

And I was reminded, as the story of Rylee and Joe played out, how friends — both old and new — are so essential to this life, especially when the world seems broken.



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