

Novel tackles daughter's life with substance-abusing father

When Jody J. Little was little – in first grade, in fact – she determined that she would become an author when she grew up. As it turns out, she became an elementary school teacher first. But just a couple of months ago, the Portland woman achieved her childhood ambition as well.

Little's debut novel, "Mostly the Honest Truth" is targeted for readers ages 8-12.

Jane is the 11-year-old heroine. She has a skateboarding dad, a bandaged arm and a life of ups and downs.

When this book opens, Jane is enduring one of the "down" phases. Pop is going into rehab – again – for his drinking, and she is being placed in a foster home – again – while he dries out.

The routine is familiar. Pop will go through the hospital's 12-day program. When he's released, he'll come get her and they'll resume their life together. When Pops is sober, he's a great dad.

But this time, things are different: Jane already knows her foster person. It's Officer D, the local cop who comes around periodically to check in on Jane and her dad.

Officer D lives in a co-housing community outside of town. The place is called Three Boulders. It's run by Old Red, an ancient man who owns the land and established the principles of the group in a three word motto: "Redemption. Forgiveness. Community."

There's no TV or alcohol allowed in Three Boulders, and all residents are expected to play softball and work in the community garden. Everyone eats together in the dining hall. All the kids attend school right there in the community. Jane dreads this, until she goes to school that first day and sees that they're holding class around an outdoor fire pit.

Soon into her 12-day stay, Jane's life seems to be on the upswing. Her new best friend, Gertie, shows her the ropes. The food is delicious. And Officer D is the best foster person she's ever had.

Still, Jane is counting down the days until Pop comes to retrieve her. There's just one problem. The social worker and Officer D want to know how Jane injured her arm – they're concerned that Jane's dad may have caused the injury. The truth is more complicated than that and Jane isn't inclined to go

into detail, but until she's willing to relate the complete story the social worker will not OK Jane's reunion with Pop.

Then, Jane's wound gets infected.

There's also bad news on another front. Old Red tells the residents that due to family issues, he is going to have to sell Three Boulders, which means the community will break up.

In "Mostly the Honest Truth," Jane's

This Week's Book

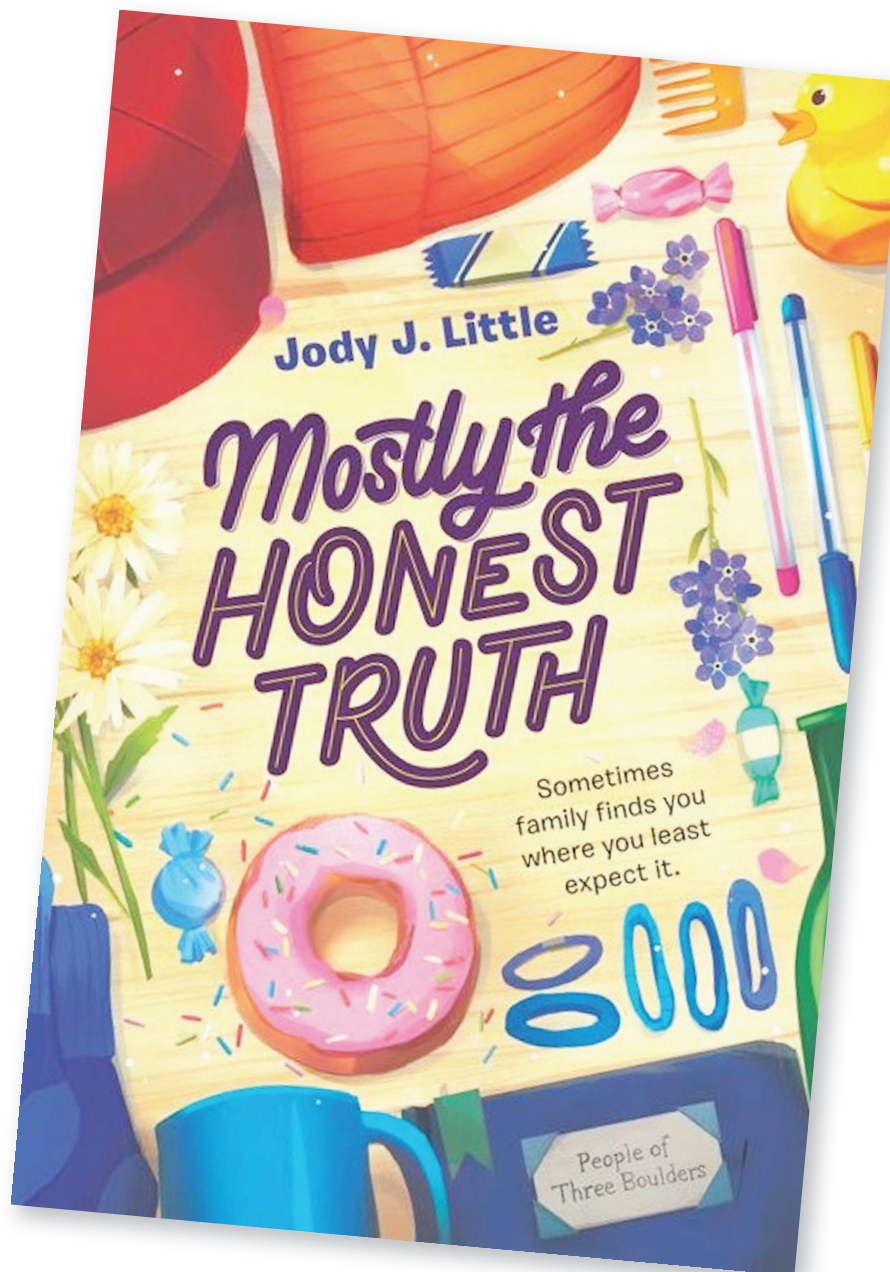
"Mostly the Honest Truth" By Jody J. Little

Harper – 270 pp – \$16.99

stressful reality of having to compensate for a substance-abusing parent's lapses will ring true for many young readers.

This tale has some plot issues – in some spots it's too tidy, in other places it drops a couple of stitches. But the characters are appealing and the messages of extending family and building community are valuable.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlinc.com



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