

Coming of age in the 1970s

Novel tells the story of a young girl learning about prejudice

This week we'll look at "Alberta & the Spark," the debut novel of Astoria writer Jennifer Nightingale.

Alberta Evans, the daughter of Canadian parents, is growing up in a small coastal community on the Washington state coast in the 1970s. Her mother keeps busy as the community's only doctor. Her dad is away on a work assignment in South America.

Alberta, called "Bert," is the youngest of three sisters. Her oldest sister, Susie, is away in college. Her 15-year-old sister Sheba, is interested primarily in boys, hairstyles and hanging out with her best friend, Peg.

So at age 13, Bert is left with plenty

This Week's Book

'Alberta & the Spark' by Jennifer Nightingale
Nestucca Spit Press — 441 pp — \$20

of time on her own. She loves to read. She loves to roam through the woods and along the beach. And she loves to ask questions.

Fortunately, Bert encounters a kindred spirit in Felix Oddany, who is out looking for owls one night and just happens to shine his light up into the tree where she has taken refuge after being teased mercilessly by Sheba and Peg.

Felix is just a couple of years older and has "a way of looking out of his face as if he noticed everything."

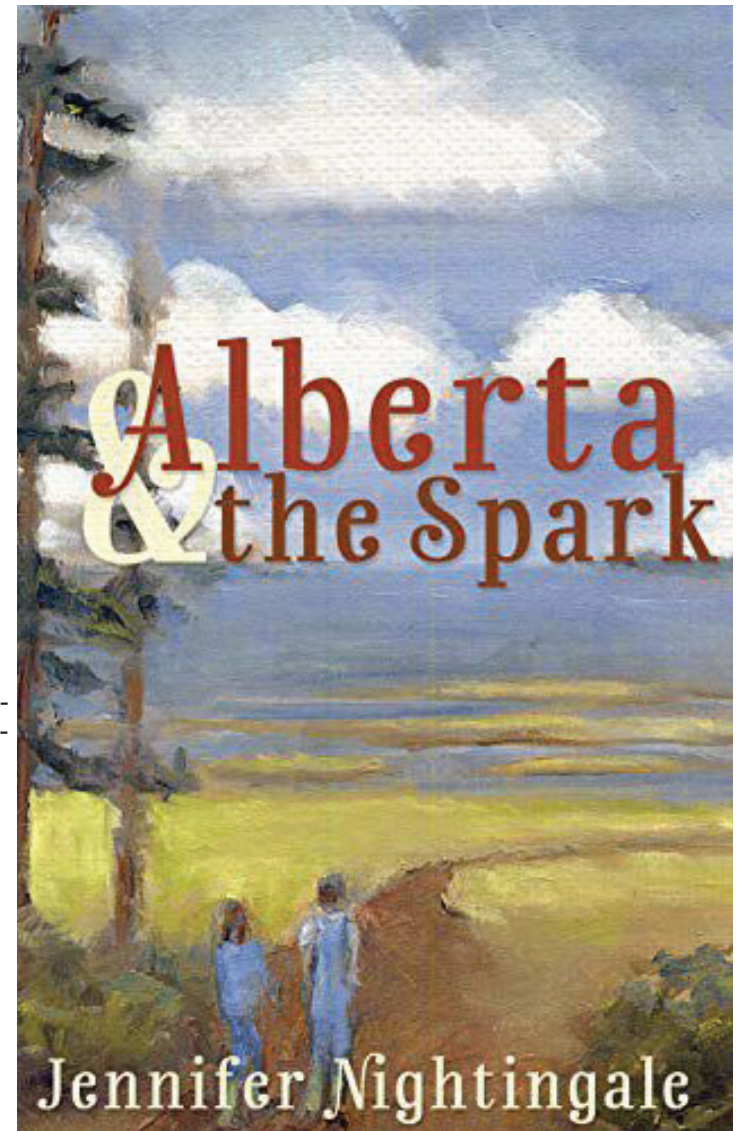
He comes from a Polish family that is trying to revive the oyster industry that once thrived in their little town. The Oddanys have brought in a couple

of Vietnamese refugee families to help with their business.

Through the Oddanys, Bert learns about ways of life that are new to her. And because she and Felix are both curious, and their imaginations are sparked by all sorts of different things — foreign languages, new foods and nature — she gives her new friend a nickname: "Spark."

However, not everyone in their small community is thrilled by the influx of these relative newcomers — the Canadians, the Poles and the Vietnamese. Some feel threatened rather than intrigued by their differences.

When the local sheriff refuses to take seriously the prejudice-fueled actions of those folks against Bert and the people she has come to care about, Bert realizes



that while she had chosen to withdraw from her sister's bullying, she must muster the courage to confront this more serious type of bullying writ large.

In "Alberta & the Spark," there is real poignancy in Bert's realization that some of the people she thought she could rely upon have failed her. Just as she learns to discern the true perils of lazy thinking, she also grows to appreciate the examples of resilience and optimism she sees around her.

This novel resorts to a rather clunky conclusion, but never mind that. Bert's story is much more about dawning realizations than it is about reaching conclusions. And in that it does not disappoint.

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.

The Illahee Apartments



**Downtown Astoria's
Most Respected
Apartment Complex
Since 1969.**



**1046 Grand Avenue
Astoria, OR 97103**

503-325-2280

Home of the Bud Mentors

Cultivated to Serve

Come Say...




BRING IN THIS COUPON FOR

10% OFF

YOUR ENTIRE ORDER!
expires 6/25/2020

Open 7 days a week

Hours are Mon, Wed, Fri 9-7
(9-10 reserved for Seniors & immune deficient folks)

Tues, Thurs, Sat and Sun 10-7
(Hours subject to change without notice)

Check out Leafly's online ordering for curbside pick up. 

✓ MEDICAL
✓ RECREATIONAL

CBD/THC • FLOWERS • EDIBLES • PREROLLS
CONCENTRATES • TOPICALS • ACCESSORIES • TSHIRTS

Do not operate a vehicle or machinery under the influence of this drug. For use only by adults 21 yrs of age and older. Keep out of reach of children.

WE MEET AND EXCEED THE CDC GUIDELINES!

193 Marine Dr. (across from the 76 Gas Station) 503.325.4078

www.hiAstoria.com