

the BOOK NOOK

■ Book Review: 'The Four Winds' by Kristin Hannah

By Lisa Britton
For EO Media Group

My introduction to Kristin Hannah came during a school field trip when another parent handed me "The Nightingale."

This historical fiction novel tells the story of Germany's occupation in France during World War II. The perspective switches between two sisters who have very different experiences during the war, yet both make their mark in how they fight back against the Germans.

I'm not afraid to admit I cried.

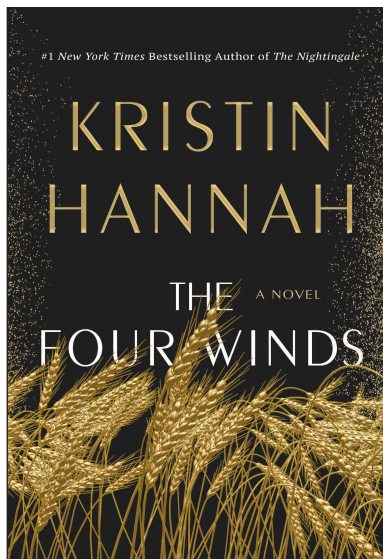
Fast forward to this year when a friend sent me a photo of Hannah's newest book, "The Four Winds," along with a glowing review. I borrowed it and, in about four days, immersed myself in the world of Elsa Martinelli and Texas in the 1920s.

But the great fortune of farmers turns dire in the 1930s with the Dust Bowl, when drought tragically paired with farming practices to kill wheat crops and farmers' livelihoods.

Elsa makes the difficult decision to head West and seek a better life for her family in California.

Here's the thing about Elsa: Her childhood and young adult years were not pleasant.

Hannah has created a wonderfully deep character with this woman who rises through adversity after adversity with a rock-solid drive to take care of her family — all while trying to navigate life with a teenage daughter who never hesitates to share her displeasure



with every situation. Having an opinionated teenage daughter in my own house, let's just say I could identify with Elsa's challenge in this department.

After surviving the Mojave Desert, Elsa and her children finally arrive in California.

But it's not the dream they envisioned. Migrants from the Midwest were not welcomed by Californians, who called Dust Bowl newcomers "Okies" no matter if they came from Oklahoma or Texas.

I haven't read much about the Dust Bowl era.

No, I haven't read "The Grapes of Wrath," but I'm thinking I should add it to my list.

I began doing research as I read "The Four Winds," prompted by the horrific living and working circumstances migrants — U.S. citizens, remember — were subjected to in California.

This is a sweeping novel with rich characters — the best way, in my opinion, to learn about history. (Another member of my household would disagree and almost exclusively prefers nonfiction.)

I'm now listening to the audiobook of "The Four Winds." It's a story that deserves to be experienced more than once.

ATTENTION READERS

GO! editors are seeking book reviews written by local readers and information on book clubs and other literary happenings in Northeast Oregon. Send submissions and ideas to lkelly@lagrandeobserver.com.

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