

THE BURNING JACKET

by Nel Rand

Eleven-year-old Raynie lives with her mother, Molly, in Anaheim, California, watching over her rescued desert tortoise, Erma Geddon. Raynie's goal is to save endangered species, particularly reptiles, from environmental threats.

Molly, recently divorced from Raynie's father, owns a bakery but dreams of being a successful visual artist. Granny Tooley, Molly's mother and Raynie's grandmother, lives as a squatter in the forest of the Southern Oregon coast range, running from childhood demons and determined to stay "off the grid."

Raynie's visits to Tooley's forest during spring breaks are the perfect time to burn last year's trash in bonfires and the perfect time to regale Raynie with stories about her ancestors, the caregivers of the earth. An important part of the bonfire experience is Granny Tooley's threadbare "burning jacket," a heavy, felted monstrosity the color of urine, spotted with black rimmed-craters where wayward sparks from past fires burned through the dense wool. The jacket smells like sour milk and lanolin. Washing the jacket is not allowed. Neither Raynie nor Molly are aware that Tooley's secret is hidden in the hem of that mangy burning jacket.

After loggers clear-cut the forest, Tooley becomes a nomad, living in her old truck, Dorothy Ann, with her two dogs. The three protagonists, Raynie, Molly, and Granny Tooley, struggle with personal challenges against a backdrop of rapidly growing environmental and political concerns. Touched by dreams and death, the three prevail and grow, as each stumbles through chaos toward a cadence that synchronizes with her own heart.

"The Burning Jacket" is Nel Rand's second novel. Her first, "Mississippi FlyWay," was a finalist for the 2007 Foreword Magazine Book of the Year Award. She is working on a collection of short stories and a mystery that goes back to her southern roots.



The Burning Jacket

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aged 12 and up

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information is available on www.nelrand.com.

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Women's Fiction/Young Adult Fiction

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"Is this a true story?" I ask. Not sure how much I want to get invested in it, although I seem to absorb all of her stories like a thirsty sponge that has been out in the desert for a long time and is suddenly thrown into a big puddle of water. Tooley is in her best story-telling mode while huddled around a fire, wrapped in her tatty old burning jacket. It almost doesn't matter what she says, the magic is in the telling.

"Oh pooh, Raynie. Who cares?" Tooley says. "Truth is like an ocean with forever shifting tides and unfathomable depths. Sometimes you have to grab a thought out of thin air and make it true to suit the needs of the time."

The Burning Jacket is the story of 11-year-old RAYNIE who lives in Anaheim, California, with her mother MOLLY. Her best friend is a rescued desert tortoise named ERMA GEDDON. Molly, recently divorced from Raynie's father, owns a bakery but dreams of being a full-time visual artist. GRANNY TOOLEY, Molly's mother, is a squatter, living on forest land in the Oregon Coast Range, off the grid and far removed from modern society.



The three protagonists in *The Burning Jacket* struggle with personal challenges including homelessness, cancer, and ethnic intolerance, against the backdrop of the 9/11 attacks, wars in the Middle East, and the increasing threat of global warming. They stumble through chaos but emerge with tolerance and love for each other and themselves.



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