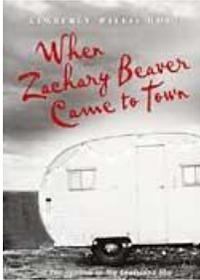




September/October 2000 issue



[When Zachary Beaver Came to Town](#) by Kimberly Willis Holt; Henry Holt and Company: New York, 1999

Has a trailer from nowhere with a 300-pound boy inside ever pulled up in front of your local grocery store? That's exactly what happened in *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town*. When I first picked up this book I found it only slightly entertaining, but as I read on I became very involved and couldn't put it down.

In the book, a 300-pound boy, Zachary Beaver, is brought to Antler, Texas, in a trailer pulled by his legal guardian, Paulie, who charges people two dollars for a look at Zachary — a one-man freak show, "The Fattest Boy in the World." At first everyone in the town stays away from Zachary because he is different, and in a small town like Antler, different is bad. Zachary's situation reminded me of a kid at an acting camp I knew who everyone made fun of — just because he was fat. Even though I'd never talked to him, I knew on the inside he was probably a great guy and I felt really sorry for him. I watched this boy sit by himself and draw — he was a great drawer — and I started talking to him some. Whenever somebody is different, people often stay away from them, but in some cases they get used to them and then, in a way, befriend them. I guess that's what I did.

And that's what happened with Zachary. Toby and Cal, two best friends in Antler — Toby being the slightest bit more mature — stay away from Zachary at first but after a while decide to help Zachary have some fun. They have Cal's older sister, who just learned to drive, take them and Zachary to a drive-in movie by building stairs in the back of the truck so he could get out. He was too fat to get out of the trailer otherwise.

They even fulfill Zachary's dream to be baptized. Zachary wanted to be baptized because that was his mom's dream for him before she died. When she died, he went to her funeral, but there was such a crowd staring at him (because of his weight) that he wouldn't get baptized. In the end, the Bowl-a-Rama owner, Ferris, who was almost

1. Read all the way through FIRST, then....
2. Annotate including what information was included and how was it "told"/formatted/ordered?



Book Review

by Eli Black, age 9,
Austin, Texas

a preacher, baptizes Zachary. Eventually, the people of Antler got used to Zachary being there, and they start to feel sorry for him, and would even leave him food on his doorstep and run away.

The book has a selection of everything from tragedy to even a little romance between the prettiest girl in town and Toby. But the main point of the book, and the part I liked best, was the way the author showed the many ways that people learn to live with and actually like strangers. This is probably a common experience, much like another one of my experiences with a Turkish boy who was in my third-grade class. He was made fun of because of his name, Bilge, and because of his personality. Over the year, I learned to like him a lot, even though no one else did, probably because my personality was more like his than the other boys in my class. I keep asking my mom how we can find Bilge in Turkey, because I miss him, but all we know about him is his first name.

Probably the saddest part of the book, and another feeling that I've had some experience with, was when Cal's older brother, Wayne, who everyone likes, is fighting in the Vietnam War and near the end, dies. Before Wayne dies, Toby writes him a letter pretending to be Cal, because Cal never returned any of Wayne's letters to him because he was too lazy. When Cal figures this out, it threatens their friendship. I can't relate to that but my friend can. Once I told him a secret and he, not thinking, told someone else, causing me to be very upset. In the end, it all turned out all right. He apologized and the secret didn't cause too much harm.

As for what happens to Cal and Toby's friendship, well, you'll just have to read the book to find out.