

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Book censorship meets its match in new middle grade novel

Hailed as “Speak” for a new generation, a sixth grader heals from trauma in latest addition to acclaimed author’s “Brave Girls Collection”

NEW HAVEN, CT—In a starred review of Kimberly Behre Kenna’s debut novel, “Artemis Sparke and the Sound Seekers Brigade” (Regal House/Fitzroy), Foreword praised Kenna’s ability to write “a courageous, passionate, and observant heroine who is vivified by her emotional complexity.” The second book in her Brave Girls Collection, “Jett Jamison and the Secret Storm” (Black Rose Writing) is no exception. Following a pre-teen who is battling her town’s book censorship along with a secret personal trauma, the story celebrates speaking up while honoring the messy, difficult journey to finding one’s voice.

About the book: Sixth-grader Jett Jamison can’t catch a break. Her home in small town Wisteria is noisy as a zoo, and her mind buzzes with bits of a traumatic memory she’d rather forget. She’s filled a shoebox with one hundred thirty-three

to-do lists, her roadmaps to peace, but they only lead to dead ends. Sister Gia, master gardener and cat-whisperer extraordinaire, suggests a book by an anonymous author, but it’s disappeared from all local libraries, and nobody wants to talk about it. Enraged at the injustice, Jett continues to dig for answers and is drawn into a censorship battle with a high-profile radio host. Her peaceful protest backfires big time, and the town goes berserk. Now, for peace to be within reach, Jett must either face up to her past or remain forever bound by silence much more suffocating than the din in Wisteria.



“Jett Jamison and the Secret Storm”

Kimberly Behre Kenna | August 3, 2023 | Black Rose Writing | Children’s, Middle Grade
Paperback | ISBN: 978-1-68513-243-9 | \$19.95



Praise for “Jett Jamison and the Secret Storm” and Kimberly Behre Kenna...

“Readers will love the memorable and realistic cast of characters in this tale of a sixth-grader’s journey to discover the mystery of a suppressed library book. Along the way, she will discover answers to the difficult storm brewing inside herself, as well as find her voice to advocate for both. **Jett is a brave, compelling character, and this novel is an engaging and inspiring take on a sensitive topic. An important read!**”

—Sonja K. Solter, award-winning author of *When You Know What I Know*

“Jett Jamison has a secret—a deeply painful one. She also has determination, a strong sense of justice, and a wide open heart that will have young readers glued to her side and rooting for her as she works to stop a censorship campaign against a book she knows she needs to read in order to heal. With bravery, beautiful writing, and just the right amount of restraint, Kimberly Behre Kenna has opened the door for a crucial and overdue conversation about sexual abuse and survival for middle grade readers. **More than twenty years ago, teenagers were given the gift of Laurie Halse Anderson’s *Speak*. Now, finally, pre-teens have this stunning and necessary book.**”

— Ona Gritz, author of *August or Forever*

"Kenna has done that rare and wonderful magic trick of immersing the reader into the psyche of a tender tween soul in crisis without any dissembling or subterfuge. The story *breathes* with subtle and deft nuances of insight and feeling... The reader of any age enters into Jett's world of pitfalls and trauma from the first page, though they quickly learn that Jett is no frozen victim: she's a fighter, a detective, and when it counts the most, a trailblazer. The town of Wisteria can be found in Anywhere, America... **This unassuming but also unabashed book will do wonders for the heart and spirit of young people grappling with silence where an open conversation could change their lives forever.**"

—JR Potter, award-winning teen mystery author of *Thomas Creeper and the Gloomsbury Secret*

“Sixth-grader Jett Jamison relies on carefully curated lists and schedules to protect her from the stress of a chaotic family life and the jumbled fragments of a disturbing memory. But an unexpected friendship and a mysterious book challenge Jett’s beliefs about the value of predictability and order and embolden her to face those who have silenced her and others. **Kimberly Behre Kenna tackles a difficult subject with the perfect balance of honesty and hope** in her portrayal of a courageous and relatable heroine whose observations about herself and the world sparkle.”

—Linda B. Davis, MSW, author of *Food Fight*

About the author...



KIMBERLY BEHRE KENNA: After years as an adolescent and family counselor, and then as a fifth grade teacher of ecology and language arts, Kimberly returned to school for her MA in creative writing from Wilkes University. Her middle-grade novel, “Artemis Sparke and the Sound Seekers Brigade” (Regal House/Fitzroy) was a finalist and received Honorable Mention in the 2019 Tassy Walden New Voices in Children’s Literature Competition. “Jett Jamison and the Secret Storm” (Black Rose) is the second book in her Brave Girls Collection. A third in the collection, as yet unpublished, won second place in The Institute of Children’s Literature 2022 MG Mystery Contest. Her poems and stories have been published in American Writers Review, Mused, Plumtree Tavern, and Rubbertop Review. Her full-length play, “Ana’s Hummingbird,” was given a staged reading at The Dramatists Guild in NYC. She’s a member of SCBWI and PEN America, and now devotes herself to writing full time. Connect with her at www.kimberlybehrekenna.com

Follow Kimberly Behre Kenna on social media:

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In an interview, Kimberly Behre Kenna can discuss:

- The importance of public libraries as safe spaces, and why she’s donating a portion of the proceeds from book sales to her local library
- The recent increase in book bannings across the U.S. and how “Jett Jamison” addresses this issue
- How and why she wrote about sexual assault for a pre-teen audience, and why it’s crucial that safe, open communication exists for that age group
- The similarities and differences between the two heroines in her “Brave Girls Collection” and what characteristics make a “brave girl”



An Interview with Kimberly Behre Kenna

1. What inspired you to write “Jett Jamison and the Secret Storm”? Were you influenced by the recent increase in book bannings in the United States?

I started writing this book before the recent increase in book bannings, around the time of #MeToo, when so many women bravely came forward to tell their stories. One day as I sat writing in my hometown library, the very place my mother escaped to in order to get away from her noisy siblings many years ago, I wondered how my own childhood would've been different if I'd had a sanctuary like this library with books to help me deal with my trauma. Jett's character grew from these real life situations, and her story evolved into exploring what would happen if the important healing books that now exist disappeared. So, my story's universal themes of book censorship and silenced voices are also very personal.

2. Part of the proceeds from book sales will benefit your hometown public library. What role does the library play in “Jett Jamison and the Secret Storm”?

The fictional Wisteria Library is largely inspired by the one in my hometown, the historic James Blackstone Library. Over the past few years, I've spent many, many hours at the Blackstone Library, where most of this book was written. The building itself is magical, and the staff and librarians provide patrons of all ages with a safe, non-judgmental space where they can explore, ask questions, and have fun. Wisteria Library offers Jett the same, until the troubling events she witnesses there illustrate the unreasonable pressure that libraries and librarians are facing today. This place that was sacred to Jett becomes yet another victim of injustice, and she decides to right the wrong.

3. Sexual assault and the resulting trauma is a topic rarely explored in middle grade fiction. Why did you want to write about this for a pre-teen audience, and how did you approach doing so?

Like Jett and many children, I'm a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. These children live in a void of secrecy. If there had been books exploring the issue, or open discussions about it back in the day, perhaps I wouldn't have kept the secret for decades. I wrote this book so that traumatized kids would feel less alone and hopefully reach out to an adult



for help. The silence needs to be broken early on so healing can begin. There's a fine balance that must be struck when writing about such topics for middle grade. The story must be age appropriate (no graphic depiction on the page) and softened with humor and hope without diminishing the serious truths of the topic. Fiction provides a safe place for young readers to explore difficult things.

4. What are the similarities and differences between the two heroines in your Brave Girls Collection: Artemis Sparke and Jett Jamison?

Both girls have lost their voices due to victimization, and their resulting lack of confidence prevents them from getting what they want. Both girls have male friends and wise adults willing to help them reclaim their voices and reach their goals, but overwhelming emotions get in the way of their achieving those things. They both find solace in nature, and the outdoor plants and animals help them restore their spirit, but the way each of their stories unfolds is what makes the two girls unique.

5. What do you hope readers will take away from “Jett Jamison and the Secret Storm”?

I hope readers come away with a better idea of how common trauma is and how it affects people, and I hope they'll feel more comfortable discussing it. This is a book that must be discussed, or we land right back at the spot where we started—a child alone with a heavy subject that they don't know what to do with. Regardless of whether the reader has been abused or not, I hope they now see that we cannot make assumptions about people based on their behavior when we have no idea of their backstory. We need to remain open and receptive to others so that they feel comfortable enough to say what they need to say.

6. What's next for you? Do you have another Brave Girls book in the works?

Yes! Book three is complete, but still needs a tweak or two. Meanwhile, I'm happy to say that my immediate future is full of visits with kids, teachers, and librarians, and many, many unread books that I've not paid enough attention to during this busy year of publishing!