

THINGS TO DO > BOOKS

SUBSCRIBER ONLY

## Readers and writers: Minnesota's Battle Lake connects mystery writer with bookstore owner — and now a book club



Kristin Lyman, center, owner of The Lionseed Bookstore & Learning Commons in Battle Lake, Minn., with authors Jess Lourey, right, author of the *Murder by Month* series, and Minnesota author Sarah Stonich, left, at the bookstore on Dec. 22, 2023. Lyman began the *Mira James Murder by Month* book club featuring a series of romcom/mysteries set in Battle Lake. She credits Lourey and Stonich with mentoring her as she moved into carrying new books as well as used. (Courtesy of Kristin Lyman)



Mira James is back in Battle Lake, where the fictional Nut Goodie-eating librarian/sleuth lives in a doublewide with her pets in the Murder by Month series written by Jess Lourey of Minneapolis.

Some fans of Lourey's mystery/romcom series might not know that [Battle Lake](#) is a real town in north central Minnesota, population 875 (which doubles in summer when Twin Cities vacationers arrive). Now, thanks to Kristin Lyman, owner of Battle Lake's [The Lionseed Bookstore & Learning Commons](#), Mira and her wacky senior citizen pal Mrs. Berns will reach a wider audience with publication of all 12 books in [the series](#) that began in 2006 with "[May Day](#)," and the new [Mira James Battle Lake Book Club](#).



Kristin Lyman's family helped cut the ribbon to open the Lionseed Bookstore and Learning Commons

“This book club is a unique opportunity for me,” Lyman says. “I grew up in Battle Lake. To have a chance to bring small-town living to a bigger audience in different ways is exciting. I am an event planner and this is right up my alley.”

Murder by Month books were first published by Minnesota-based Midnight Ink, but when the imprint was closed in 2019 by parent company Lewellyn Worldwide, rights reverted to Lourey. Her series’ new publisher is Thomas & Mercer.

To celebrate the books’ new covers, new content, and deep edits, Lyman created the yearlong book club with Lourey’s blessings. It will be launched at 2 p.m. on Sunday, May 5 with Lourey virtually hosting and Lyman moderating. It’s free and open to the public (go to [thelionseed.com/pages/events](https://thelionseed.com/pages/events)).

Lourey, who grew up in Paynesville, lived in Battle Lake in 1989 and 1996 and she loves the town where she wrote the first of the books in which Mira finds a corpse every month. After finishing this series Lourey went on to win awards for bestselling thrillers such as “Unspeakable Things,” “Salem’s Cipher,” “The Quarry Girls” and “The Taken Ones.”

“Jess and I are both from small towns and I think those of us who grew up in farm towns — have left and come back — have a connection, a certain unspoken understanding of what that experience is like,” Lyman said. “Jess, Mira James and I — we have each ‘come home’ to Battle Lake to empower and reset. My heart is here and it is where I belong among the beauty of the people, places and landscape. Being wrapped in the embrace, albeit sometimes passive-aggressive, of your small town is unlike anything else.”

In “May Day” Mira has a dead-end job in Minneapolis and a cheating boyfriend. She jumps at the chance to reinvent herself in Battle lake, where she meets sexy Jeff. When her lover is found dead between the library’s reference stacks, Mira turns detective by digging into Jeff’s life and uncovering secrets in the small town. In later books Mira is a reporter for the local newspaper and heads to the State Fair where she investigates the murder of the dairy princess. She spends time in Minneapolis where her old haunts have disappeared, reminding her that too much alcohol was one of the reasons she left the city. When the series ended in 2019 with “April Fool,” Mira had a new boyfriend and was working to become a private investigator.

“The Murder by Month series has a huge following of readers from all walks of life who have identified with this idea of getting back to your roots, coming home,” Lyman says. “As a character in ‘May Day’ tells Mira, ‘You got to get back to the dirt...’ But these are not overly serious books — they are the fun, humorous misadventures of 30-something Mira James, who is daring to start over in Battle Lake.”

Jess Lourey admits on social media that there are mixed feelings among Battle Lake residents about her mysteries being set there, but that doesn’t bother Lyman

---

Lyman and Lourey didn't live in Battle Lake at the same time, but Lyman read the Mira books after she learned they were set in her town. Then she got busy opening The Lionseed Books in May of 2022, housed in a Victorian-style 1903 house with a turret. It features a real wardrobe and a tunnel with stuffed lions in homage to "The Witch and the Wardrobe." The shop has already hosted a wedding proposal in the tunnel and the ceremony a year later.

Lourey and Lyman met at The Lionseed when Jess and Minnesota author Sarah Stonich were on a reading tour. Lourey returned to promote "The Taken Ones" and Lyman approached her about a book club for Mira. Lourey, who's full of ideas and always one for trying new things, thought it was an awesome idea.

"This was my first foray into new books," recalled Lyman, whose store had mostly dealt with used books. "Jess and Sarah were such amazing mentors. Both helped me with who I needed to know, contacts. Since then we've hosted quite a few Minnesota authors."

When it comes to small towns, everybody is connected to everybody, Lyman points out. Jennifer Reiter, who attended the College of St. Benedict, as did Lyman, has roots in Battle Lake and is a friend of Lyman and Lourey.

Reiter and Lyman collaborated on creating the book club.

"It was fun," Lyman says of their brainstorming. "Together we came up with what's on the website, all the things we are doing with this club, showing parts of the books that are real people and places."

There are four levels of book club membership — chat, meeting, book box and special events. Chat level is free; the rest are on a fee basis. Lyman emphasizes that she wants all the club activities to be fun, including gifts and prizes at some of the membership levels. "We're not going to sit around and talk about the philosophy of life," she jokes. (For information go to [thelionseed.com/collections/mira-james-battle-lake-book-club](http://thelionseed.com/collections/mira-james-battle-lake-book-club).)

Besides running Lionseed, Lyman has a full-time job as owner of Tending Windmills, focused on serving local communities through creative education and community-building endeavors. She helps students learn organization and prioritizing, including those with ADHD who are smart but learn differently. In 2020 she was selected as a PACER Leader, providing her with training to become an advocate and resource for students with special needs.

"A lot of my work is building students' confidence," she says. "Growing up I saw my classmates suffer, thought of as 'dumb farmers' who would never amount to anything. They were brilliant people with different skills." Her friend Reiter is in a similar field as head of Le Grandest Productions, offering inclusive arts programming for people with disabilities.

Lyman is so busy now she admits she's thinking about hiring help at the store, even though her husband, Andy, staffs the cash register when he can. But they have three children so time

Still, Lyman is excited about the new club, which goes beyond reading the Murder by Month books.

"I've been planning this business since I was 7 years old," she says. "I've always wanted to have a cultural center based around books to expand curiosity and education, someplace to bring people together that isn't the local bar, a place of true community where generations and people of any background could gather and exchange stories, ideas, skills and dreams. All this plays into the Mira James Battle Lake Book Club."

## Do You Remember Her? Take A Deep Breath Before Looking At Her

Finance Wealth Post | Sponsored

## New SBA Funds Available for 2024

Loan Options From \$10k - \$2MM. Fill out our application in minutes and see what SBA loans you can get for your business!

Lendio | Sponsored

Get Quote

## Remember Her? Sit Down Before You See What She Looks Like Now

Loan Insurance Wealth | Sponsored

---

## Amazon's Worst Nightmare: Thousands Canceling Prime for This Clever Hack

This simple trick can save tons of money on Amazon, but most Prime members are ignoring it.

Online Shopping Tools | Sponsored

## Pawn Star Pleads Guilty, Goodbye Pawn Stars :(

Fans were surprised to hear this about their favorite pawn star...

HotPopToday | Sponsored

Read More

---

## 15% off t-shirts that fit all your brand's needs

Custom t-shirts make promoting your brand a breeze, at prices that fit just right. Use code TSHIRT15 to get 15% off.

---