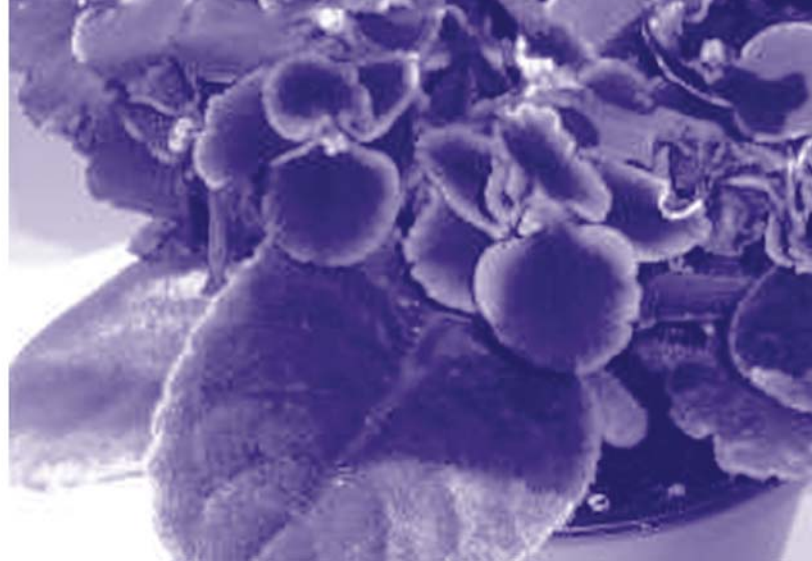


Media Information

Kati VanBaale

THE
Space

BETWEEN



River City Publishing





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About River City Publishing

Like the nearby Alabama River that flows through the heart of the South, literature sustains us, transports us outside of ourselves, and brings us home. River City Publishing, a literary press located in Montgomery, Alabama, is dedicated to discovering the books that do just that.

Carolyn Newman
Publisher



Praise for

Written with unflinching compassion and lyrical power, Kali VanBaale's *The Space Between* is a heart-rending look into events that are both extraordinary and painfully familiar, and an exploration of a family's collective soul--how it trembles and aches and, with luck and time and hope, struggles to recover. By so poignantly rendering the characters' lives, VanBaale holds a mirror up to society, and what she reveals is as shocking as it is comforting: the space between us is an illusion, so we're all in this together.

—Bret Anthony Johnston, author of *Corpus Christi*

Kali VanBaale's sharp pen slices straight to the heart of a mother's agony and guides us through her painful journey toward self-revelation; the triumph of this debut novelist lies in her compassion for those who suffer tragedy and learn from their mistakes. This is an important novel for parents and teenagers, for anyone who cares about what's happening in our schools and homes. I read straight through the darkness into the morning hours that shimmered with light.

—Bev Marshall, author of *Walking Through Shadows*, *Right As Rain*, and *Hot Fudge Sundaes Blues*



A Synopsis

Valentine's Day in Middle America. Judith Elliott fixes breakfast for her affluent suburban family. She kisses them all goodbye, tends to the house, makes plans for later with her husband. Then comes the news: her teenage son, Lucas, has taken a gun to school. He has killed two other students, a teacher, and himself.

Judith, an ordinary wife and mother, must suddenly grapple with extraordinary grief and horror. As reporters gather and lawsuits loom, society shuts out the surviving members of the Elliott family—including husband and father Peter, and daughter and sister Lindsey—who are as blindsided by the tragedy as anyone. Judith struggles to be the center of what remains of her family, but finds herself plagued by doubts and unanswerable questions that may eventually disrupt her life more completely than the initial tragedy.

Kali VanBaale's Fred Bonnie Award-winning first novel examines the aftermath of this modern nightmare with clear-eyed dramatic precision. It will leave every reader wondering what does indeed lurk in the dark but unknowable spaces that exist even between the most loving of family members.



Q & A

1. What does the title, *The Space Between*, mean?

I am a huge Dave Matthews' Band fan and was listening to their song 'The Space Between' one morning while driving my son to preschool. For the first time, I really started to pay attention to certain sections of the lyrics. *The space between...the tears we cry...is the laughter...that keeps us coming back for more...the space between...our wicked lies...is where we hope to keep safe from the pain...the space between...your heart and mind...is the space we fill with time...*

Music, like poetry, is so open to individual interpretation and meaning. For me, the song felt like it was about grief and mistakes, just trying to get on with life through painful times. I couldn't get the words, *the space between*, out of my head. It is such a simple yet open-ended phrase that when applied to different situations, creates many deeper meanings. I loved where the words kept taking me when I thought about them in relation to Judith's story, how space within our lives can be both healthy and damaging all at the same time. There can be dangerous spaces within our relationships, such as between parents and children or husbands and wives, yet space during times of grief and sadness—the magic of time—can help heal our wounds just enough to where we can bear them and keep placing one foot in front of the other.

2. How long did it take you to write *The Space Between*?

I spent nearly three years writing this story—one year on the first draft and two more on editing and revising—but sat on the idea without putting down a single word for over fifteen months. It is such a sensitive, mine field-laden subject that I didn't want to mishandle it but jumping in too fast. I also didn't want to take it straight from any of the stories covered on the news. I wanted my character of Judith to have her own voice, to tell her own story and find insight as to how something like this happened within *her* family.

3. How much of this story was taken from news headlines?

My first seed idea for this story came to me two years after the Columbine tragedy. I was six months pregnant when the shootings occurred so it was a very scary, confusing time to be brining a child into the world. On the second anniversary, I was watching the news and old footage of that April day and my thoughts kept coming back to the mothers of the shooters, how they would ever begin to put their lives back together. I kept wondering if they rushed to the school like all the other parents—worried, terrified and trying to find their children, oblivious to what had really happened. The image of a woman then came to me, standing in front of a row of buses as they unloaded, searching for her son in the crowd like so many other mothers, only to discover in the same sec-



ond that not only was he dead, but he was the gunman. My driving force from that point on was uncovering what would happen to this woman and her family. In order for me to tell any story, I must start with a fresh, compelling character banging around in my head with such urgency that I can't go another day without getting the words out.

4. Are there any autobiographical elements to *The Space Between*?

Fortunately, I've never suffered the profound loss of a child, but I have known and been close to several families who have. I am convinced that I could have never written this story had I not been a mother myself. I know in my heart that I could not have *imagined* the loss of a child without first *knowing* the overwhelming love and responsibility of a child.

Looking at the words of the story now, I do see much of myself in Judith in terms of her lack of confidence as a mother, always second-guessing and plagued with doubts. Having two boys myself, I am familiar with reactionary parental behaviors, unconsciously withdrawing from situations in which you feel you have no answers or all the wrong answers.

5. Did you find Judith a likeable or unlikable character? How about Caroline?

Writers can regard their characters as real people. Judith was like a living, breathing person to me and I always felt sort of protective of her, worrying about her during the course of the story and wanting for her to somehow be okay by the end. But she was also a frustrating character to me, indecisive and passive when she should've been stepping up sooner to take control. I wanted to shake some sense into her at times. Regardless, I did like her because she was all too human and bravely faced her faults as a wife and mother.

As for Caroline, she was a strange, fun and sad character to write, so yes, I definitely liked her from the first scene in the car. At times, though, I wondered if she was too forgiving, too understanding, but then I realized by the end of the story that forgiveness and understanding were the sole reason she went to Judith's house the first night. Caroline had already made up her mind that she wanted peace in her heart for this boy and his family and was simply searching for the validation, which she finally got.

6. Who is the intended audience?

I understood that by choosing the point-of-view of the mother of a shooter, I ran the risk of appearing as if I were taking sides, though that couldn't be further from the truth. In no way was I trying to turn this into a who-suffers-more kind of contest. Grief cannot be measured or compared. Loss is loss. I wrote a voice that spoke loudest to me, one side of a multi-sided tragedy, which turned out to be Judith's. Whether a reader pities or blames her, the story still brings up many complex issues for which there are no easy answers. The very nature of our society breeds gray areas in parenting that the average parent is not always equipped to handle. We are often quick to place



blame after a tragedy, demand answers, justice and punishment, but at the end of the day, no one sets out to *raise* their child to commit a heinous crime like a school shooting. Then again, at the end of the day, logic such as that still isn't much comfort to the families who senselessly lost a loved one. See...no easy answers.

7. What are the dominant themes?

The first theme of Judith's story is survival—simply getting through each day, each hour, each minute. I was drawn to the initial twelve-month timeline because it is the rawest time of the grieving process. It is a year of firsts without a loved one—holidays, birthdays and the anniversary of the death. It is also during this unsure, tumultuous period that families must find their way back to some sort of normalcy and routine.

The other theme, which emerged to my surprise the further I got along, is forgiveness. Each character deals with forgiveness, or lack thereof, at some point in the story. I knew from the start that their inability to forgive not just each other but also themselves would ultimately cause the breakdown of Judith and Peter's marriage. The families I've known who lost a child seemed as if they were either immediately brought closer together or driven apart.

Caroline sort of became the symbol of forgiveness for the entire story. It is through her ability to forgive Judith that Judith is then able to begin the process of forgiving herself.

8. Who are your favorite authors, and how have they influenced your work?

The Book of Ruth by Jane Hamilton is one of my favorite books simply because I fell in love with Ruth Dahl's narrative voice. I also loved the tiny, heartbreaking nuances of *Ordinary People* by Judith Guest, the masterful layers of *The Hours* by Michael Cunningham and anything by Anne-Marie MacDonald for her huge, gutsy plotlines and brave choices in subject matter that would make other writers squirm.

I do enjoy the works of Edith Wharton and Jane Austen (all hail the woman who created Mr. Darcy) but admittedly, I'm attracted to mostly modern fiction and tend to read what is current and closest to my own style of writing. I've been most influenced by Elizabeth Strout, author of *Amy and Isabelle* and *Abide With Me*. I took a point-of-view workshop taught by her at the University of Iowa Summer Writing Festival several years ago. She spoke so passionately about giving fictional characters an *honest* voice, about how on the first page of a story, as writers we ask a reader to trust us, to take our hand so we can lead them through the story, and that it is our job to not abandon them or lead them astray. The two days I spent with her changed my writing forever and I have enormous respect for not just her talent, but also her integrity.





About the Author

Kali VanBaale grew up on a dairy farm in rural Iowa. She is an alumnus of Upper Iowa University; *The Space Between* is her first novel. She lives on an acreage outside Des Moines with her husband and two children.



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