

LIVING

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Camano author writes for audience neglected by many publishers



Dan Bates / The Herald

Rink's "Jimi & Isaac" series covers look like book reports. The books are aimed at kids but adults could enjoy them as well.

By [Gale Fiege](#)

Herald Writer

Camano Island writer Phil Rink writes about real-world situations for young readers.

You know, like the adventures of Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys, Tom Swift, Ramona Quimby and Henry Huggins.

Now we have [Rink's "Jimi & Isaac."](#)

The fifth in a series of Rink's books about these young teen friends is titled "The Brain Injury" and it's about Isaac's dad falling off the roof.

[Kirkus Reviews](#) magazine named it one of the best books of 2015.

From the book's prologue: "Jimi and Isaac are middle school boys, stumbling and shoving their way into manhood. Isaac has always acted older than his age. So when Isaac's dad gets hurt, Isaac thinks he's ready to step in and take charge. But maybe he's not ready. Some things you're never ready for."

"The Brain Injury," says the Kirkus reviewer, paints a moving portrait of a boy whose life is thrown into chaos in "a simple and powerful story, authentically told. Highly recommended for both its quality of writing and its superb handling of difficult subject matter."

Rink's books have short sentences and short chapters, but big, smart, scientific ideas. And no perfunctory happy endings. The characters are familiar and the settings are tangible, but the plots are extraordinary and full of dilemma.

You might call them boy's books, but lots of girls love this kind of thing. Even adults can learn from these books.

The Jimi & Isaac series is not fantasy or dystopian or anything like most of the popular fiction out there for middle school readers. Jimi & Isaac books are about real stuff. Like soccer, building things, getting into fights and joking around.

These buddies, Jimi (named for Hendrix) and Isaac (named for Newton), are believable characters, and Rink writes well about them.

Rink is a mechanical engineer, an inventor (with 11 patents so far), an entrepreneur and a science and soccer coach.

The first Jimi & Isaac book ("School Soccer") starts with the early days of middle school and deals with the nature of competition. The second ("Keystone Species") takes the boys on a trip to the Northwest's open ocean. The third and fourth books ("Mars Mission" and "Solar Power") deal with science, inventions, engineering and business.

A lot of what happens in "The Brain Injury" has to do with Isaac coming to grips with the idea that his father might not completely recover. Rink had several doctors check over his work.

“We meet (our readers) where they are, then teach and provoke to make them interested and curious,” said Rink, 55. “We give (young people) a comfortable place to stand while they create themselves and find their place in the world. We work hard to be bold.”

The idea for the book series was born after the Rink family read “Hatchet,” the 1987 Newbery award-winning, young-adult, wilderness-survival novel written by Gary Paulsen. Very little similar fiction was available from the school library, Rink said.

Then the Rink family — Phil, his wife Nancy and their children Lena and Pender (now adults) — took a year-long sailing trip around the Caribbean, after which they released a book and an accompanying video about the adventure, [“Mermaid: Our Family in Paradise.”](#)

Rink's interest in writing was piqued. He wanted kids to have access to substantial books about invention and science, so he decided to write his own.

But because Rink's books don't fit into the popular genre of middle readers fiction, he's had no luck getting big publishers to take notice. Publishing houses want to churn out books they know will sell, and sell primarily to girls, he said.

“Some of the publishing agents told us that boys don't read,” Nancy Rink said. “But boys are not stupid. They're just different, and as a society we can't say they don't matter. Our books are written so that readers can picture themselves as Jimi and Isaac. The books are funny and hard to put down and this latest one might make you cry.”

Believing in what they were producing, Phil and Nancy went the self-publishing route. Many self-published books offer good material, but most libraries and [Scholastic Books](#) steer clear of anything that isn't from a major publisher.

“Our goal is to be recognized by Scholastic Books and get into their school book fairs,” Rink said. “Bringing the books to market has turned out to be more challenging than anything in my engineering career.”

Copies of the Jimi & Isaac books can be found in [the Sno-Isle Libraries](#) at Stanwood and Camano Island. But the Rinks donated those books.

“We've seen a huge proliferation of self-published books and our staff does not have time to read them all,” said Nancy Messenger, the collection development manager for Sno-Isle. “We buy local historical books, but we add other local material if people are willing to share.”

However, the Kirkus review of “The Brain Injury” and a growing demand for the book could result in its purchase for the library system, she said. (Indie publishers pay to have Kirkus review books, with no guarantee of a positive review.)

To make the books accessible, Rink said, the Jimi & Isaac paperbacks are offered for [about \\$9 each through Amazon](#) and on the Jimi & Isaac website at [www.jimiandisaacbooks.com](#). Kindle copies are \$1 and then they can be downloaded to a smart phone.

“And I am happy to visit fifth grade classrooms to talk with students about the books,” Rink said. “It's

about helping boys find their place in the world.”

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