

TO THE DISCUSSION LEADER

Author Kristiana Gregory has enjoyed a lifelong interest in the American Revolution ever since her mother told Kristiana that her ancestors marched with General George Washington in the battle with Britain for America's independence.

In her latest addition to the Dear America series, Gregory continues the story of Abigail Jane Stewart that she began in her highly acclaimed first book *The Winter of the Red Snow* set in Valley Forge in 1777. It is now two years later. The war continues as Abigail and her family, now homeless, join scores of other women and children who follow their fathers, husbands, and sons as they fight the Redcoats. From Abigail's vantage point, young readers smell the smoke of battle, feel the rumble of cannon fire, endure the horrible weather, fight off the pangs of starvation, and experience life and death battles that were part and parcel of the American Revolution.

Cannons at Dawn offers readers a close-up view of General Washington's leadership, Martha Washington's graciousness, and Benedict Arnold's treachery. The welcomed help of the soldiers and supplies from France coupled with vivid portraits of heroism on the part of the American Patriots puts human faces on a war fought over 200 years ago.

Cannons at Dawn

The Second Diary of Abigail Jane Stewart, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, 1779

BY KRISTIANA GREGORY

Ages 8-14 • 256 pages

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SUMMARY

"I am only thirteen, but this is the cruelest weather of my whole life. There is one storm after another. The huts are nearly buried in snow," writes Abigail Jane Stewart in her second diary. It is February 1780, the Revolutionary War continues, and Abby, her mother, and younger siblings are camped near General Washington's headquarters at Morristown, New Jersey. After a fire destroyed their home in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, the Stewarts have joined hundreds of women and children who are encamped with the Continental Army to be near the men of their families. To "earn their keep," the women cook, do laundry and mend uniforms in return for meat and flour. Staying with the Stewarts are the Campbells whose son, Willie, is a soldier in Abby's father's company. Willie and Abby soon become friends.

Life is harsh in camp. Food is meager and often rotten. Frostbite and illness are a constant fear, and the camp must be prepared to move at a moment's notice to avoid detection by the British army, as well by Indians who have joined forces with the British troops. On one of the marches, Abby and her sister, Sally, meet several people who are on the run: Miss Lulu and her daughter Mazie, who appear to be "freed Negroes," but are actually runaway slaves, and young Tom Penny, a British drummer boy who has been separated from his father's regiment. As the winter wears on, and supplies run out, the starving soldiers begin to raid nearby farms for food and firewood. The promised arrival of French reinforcement troops seems unlikely, and the Patriots talk of mutiny or desertion.

The infiltration of spies and the discovery that one of General Washington's trusted officers, Benedict Arnold, is a traitor further demoralizes the troops.

Finally spring arrives and as Abigail turns fourteen, she observes she has become more patient, more grownup. She also has developed a special fondness for Willie Campbell. Willie begins "calling on" Abby, and the following June they are married.

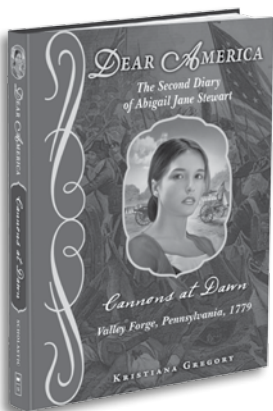
As the army continues its march, the Stewarts travel to Philadelphia, where Abby's mother and siblings decide to stay with the eldest daughter, Elisabeth, and her family. However, Abby feels the need to continue following the troops for, as she says, "If anything happens to Willie, I want to be there." She tells her mother, "I shall look after Papa too." The long awaited French troops arrive, and the combined armies march on Yorktown, Virginia, where the British General Cornwallis is camped. After days of heavy cannon fire, Cornwallis surrenders, and there is much celebration. When Abby asks her father, "What does this all mean?," he answers, "We are free men. We shall make our own laws." Abby and Willie are reunited and they look forward to beginning life together in their own home.

THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK

1. What do you think was the most difficult challenge Abigail and her family faced as they followed the Continental Army?
2. Other than Abigail, who is your favorite character in *Cannons at Dawn*? Why?
3. General George Washington's wife appears throughout Abigail's story. Based on Abby's entries, what kind of person is Lady Washington? How about General Washington?
4. Why do you think the author of *Cannons at Dawn*, Kristiana Gregory, put the Redcoat drummer boy, Thomas Augustus Penny, in this book?
5. During the long winter days in camp, Abby starts a school for the younger children. What does she teach them and how does she do this without books or newspapers?
6. Who is Benedict Arnold and why does Mama say of her husband, "He's no Benedict Arnold?" (p. 167)
7. When do you think Abby first realizes that she likes Willie Campbell? What special things does Willie do for Abby that causes her to feel that way?
8. What is a mutiny? Why did the American Patriots under the command of General George Washington consider doing this?
9. Reread Abigail's diary entries for September 30, 1780 through October 6, 1780. Why does Abby feel "sick with worry" and like her "heart would burst"?

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

1. Read Abigail Stewart's first diary, *The Winter of the Red Snow*. Which winter do you think was worse: the winter of 1777 at Valley Forge or the winter of 1779 at Morristown, New Jersey? Explain your answer.
2. When Abigail and her family pack to go to her father's camp, they only pack a few items: a kettle, flour, dried beef, a blanket for each of them, Mama's spoon, Abby's diary, pen, and ink. If you had to move somewhere suddenly and could only take six items with you, what would you pack and why?
3. Do some investigating and see if you can find out why the country of France sent soldiers, supplies, and money to help the American Patriots win the war against the Redcoats?
4. Research each of the following terms. What is their relationship to the story?
 - a. queue
 - b. Aurora borealis
 - c. ash cake
 - d. Hessian
 - e. artillery
 - f. reveille
5. One of the dishes Abby serves to the soldiers is "hasty pudding." This dish was also called Indian pudding. Try making some, using the recipe at the website that follows. How do you like it? www.theheartofnewengland.com/food-Hasty-Pudding.html
6. Do you think *Cannons at Dawn* is a good title for Abigail Stewart's second diary? If you could select a different title, what would it be and why?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KRISTIANA GREGORY is the bestselling author of many Dear America titles, including *The Winter of Red Snow*, *Across the Wide and Lonesome Prairie*, and *Seeds of Hope*. She has also written the Cabin Creek Mysteries. She lives in Boise, Idaho, with her family.

AN INTERVIEW WITH KRISTIANA GREGORY

Some years have passed since you wrote *The Winter of the Red Snow*. What challenges, if any, did you face in picking up and continuing Abigail's story?

The biggie was incorporating the epilogue from *Red Snow* into the sequel. For instance, it said that “at the age of 15, Abigail married a blacksmith named Willie Campbell.” My first thought was, uh oh! How is THIS going to happen? When my original editor, Ann Reit, and I had been brainstorming Abby’s adventures, we just tossed around ideas, not foreseeing that I might actually have to weave them into a sequel. It was a lot of fun though, developing a romance for Book Two!

The epilogue also mentioned Elisabeth and Ben Valentine, whose arm was amputated after the Battle of Monmouth. Since he “was sent to Philadelphia to recover,” I had the Stewarts spend time there in the sequel, before following the army. It was a way to demote a couple of characters that didn’t need to be in the main story. But it also gave me a chance to re-introduce the reader to George and Martha Washington and Benedict Arnold, who really were in Philadelphia during that January of 1779.

You dedicate this book to your mother, Jeanne Kern Gregory, “whose ancestors marched with General Washington.” Do you have a favorite family story your mother would tell about her relatives and this pivotal time in American history?

She remembers as a young girl going on a trip with her father. They drove from their home in New Jersey to Kernstown, Virginia, which apparently was a tiny burg. He described relatives who had settled there and who had fought in the War for Independence, saying she could be very proud of her Kern ancestors.

Allowing family members to follow the American troops seems like a bad idea for the women and children and the soldiers themselves. Why was it allowed? What did you find out about the camp followers that surprised you most?

General Washington believed women and children were distractions: they would slow down an army on the march and, because of the commotion that comes with having kids and babies around, they might be targeted by the enemy, which could demoralize the men. But the General also realized that women brought emotional and physical comfort—he certainly approved of Mrs. Washington and the officers’ wives being at the winter encampments! Their help with laundry, mending, and cooking made it easier for the soldiers to rest in down time. In some cases, fewer soldiers deserted if their families were nearby.

I was surprised by the hardships and deprivation, yet how adaptable the women were. They forged ahead, managed their kids, had babies, and helped one another. Their rugged lives were harder than I had imagined.

Your attention to weather is very thorough and authentic. Was any explanation ever given for the eerie day of darkness, May 19, 1780?

At the time there were some reports in New England of an ash-like scum that gathered on the surface of ponds and water barrels, also rain that was sooty and tasted like burned leaves. A probable source may have been a massive forest fire in eastern Ontario, now Algonquin Provincial Park, which is believed to have occurred in the spring of 1780.

The story of Miss Lulu and Mazie is an interesting one. Were runaway slaves very common in the Revolutionary War era?

I was inspired by a runaway advertisement from 1778 describing a “mulatto slave named Sarah, but since calls herself Rachael ... a lusty wench, about 34 years old, big with child” who was with her six-year-old son, Bob. She pretended to have a husband with a Maryland regiment “and passed herself off as a free woman.”

What do you hope readers will take away with them after reading *Cannons at Dawn*?

My hope is that Abby’s story will shed light on the heroic beginnings of this country; and that readers might be inspired to their own acts of kindness and bravery in a rough situation.

What would you like to ask your readers after they’ve finished reading Abigail’s second diary?

What would you do if a foreign army invaded your town?

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