

Religious Publisher Under Fire for Dropping Gay Author

A Utah book publisher has drawn criticism for shelving a young-adult novel after its coauthor demanded his gay partner be mentioned in a flap-jacket biography.

Writer Michael Jensen said the company, Cedar Fort Publishing, which focuses on books for the Mormon market, told him that including mention of his boyfriend in the book would risk upsetting bookstores it does business with.

The dispute between the publisher and the author, who grew up in the Mormon church, underscores tension within the Mormon community over homosexuality and public acknowledgement of same-sex relationships.

The book, *Woven*, is conceived as the first installment of a young-adult fantasy series. In it, a princess embarks on a quest with the ghost of a young man to bring him back to life.

There are no references to homosexuality in the novel, Jensen said. The 34-year-old author said he was “mortified” by the publisher’s decision to drop the book.

“I couldn’t believe this was happening over the word *partner*,” he said in a telephone interview.

Cedar Fort did not respond to phone and email messages seeking comment. Company President Bryce Mortimer last week told Fox 13 News in Salt Lake City that the decision to cancel the deal was based not on Jensen’s sexuality but his insistence that it be referenced in his biography.

“Where it started becoming uncomfortable for us is where he really started to push it, and almost use our company as a springboard for supporting that,” Mortimer told the station.

Coming to the author's defense were 53 Mormon writers, including novelist and self-help writer Abel Keogh. They signed an open letter this week expressing "disagreement and disappointment" with the publisher's actions against Jensen.

Jensen said he was seeking treatment equal to that accorded the novel's coauthor, David Powers King, whose wife was mentioned in an author biography on the flap jacket.

Jensen said he chose Cedar Fort for the book in large measure because of his friendship with its founder, Lyle Mortimer. They shared passion for musical theater, he said.

The book was set to go to print in early August, but Jensen said he was informed by email on Aug. 2 that his author biography could not include mention of his gay partner.

Jensen said that in a follow-up phone call with Mortimer, the publisher accused him of seeking to push his own agenda and of ruining families.

Cedar Fort last week told Jensen and King it was returning the rights to the book to them, Jensen said.

As word of the incident spread in recent days, Jensen said that he and his coauthor have been contacted by a number of agents and publishers interested in the book. "We're looking for the silver lining," Jensen said.

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