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## A simple moment draws inspiration for inclusive new children's book

By Jennifer Wake



Local author reads her book Photos provided

For many, certain events serve as inspiration for a life's work or for a creative endeavor. For local author and freelance writer Kara Navolio, the experience of living abroad during a foreign exchange trip to Madrid during high school and a return visit to the country in 2016 planted a seed in her mind: everybody can dance, whatever their abilities.

"I didn't immediately think of a kids' book, but the seed was there," said Navolio, who just published her book "Everybody Can Dance!" (Brandylane Publishers, Inc.) on May 28 and who will be doing a special story time and dance party at Bel and Bunna's Books at 4 p.m. Friday, June 7 in Lafayette.

During Navolio's foreign exchange trip, her Spanish "sister" Bela was taking Flamenco classes, and she occasionally went with her to watch. "I stayed in touch with the family over the years, but had never revisited Spain in all the years since 1980," Navolio explained. "Bela went on to become a professional Flamenco dancer. Fast-forward to 2016 when my Spanish `mom' insisted that I return to Spain. It was a wonderful homecoming with her and three of her five children. Bela, now retired from professional dancing, invited my husband and me to come and see her students' dance

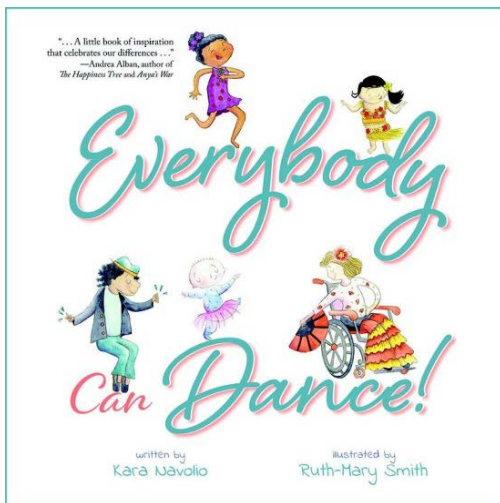
performance. All of her students have Down syndrome, and when I saw their joy and her pride in them this idea that everybody has a need to express themselves and everybody can dance was planted in my mind."

To Navolio, dance, just like all art forms, is a way for people to come together. "You don't have to speak the same language or move in the same way, be trained or not, to understand each other," she said. "Dance shows us how we are more similar to each other than different. I wanted kids of all cultures, all shapes and sizes, and all abilities to see themselves in this book. I also wanted kids to see that others who look different share a similar joy in dancing, and that it can unite people."

The illustrations by Ruth-Mary Smith make Navolio's characters "so whimsical and fun, while staying true to the message of diversity and inclusion," said the author, while the rhyming text has a cadence that captures the movement throughout the book and its dance theme.

"Dance is something that unites people," Navolio said. "You don't have to take classes or be trained; everyone can do it. It's a wonderful way for kids to express themselves using their body instead of their words. Something about dancing brings joy. Also, my experience as the parent of a trained dancer is that dance gave my daughter a strong sense of confidence. She is not afraid to speak in front of groups or be on stage. It was also a great way to stay fit and relieve stress as she got older."

Navolio hopes that the book will do its small part in making us all see that we are all more similar than different.



Kara Navolio



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