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



Local author reads her book Photos provided

By Jennifer Wake

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 every-

body 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."

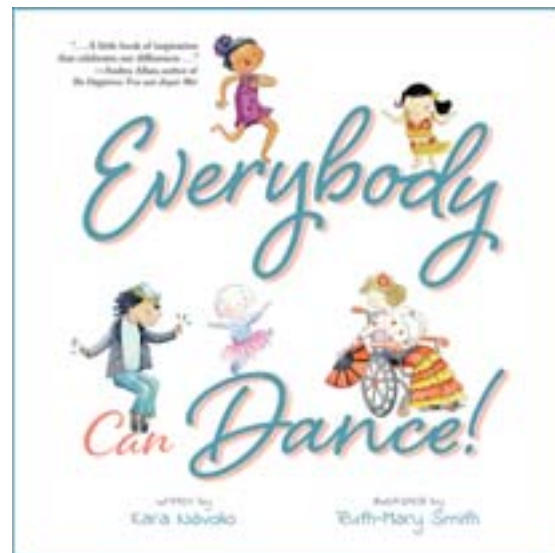
The illustrations by Ruth-Mary Smith make Navolio's characters "so whimsical and fun, while staying true to the message of diversity and inclusion," said the author, while the rhyming text has a cadence that captures the movement throughout the book and its dance theme.

"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



SMC presents 'Convergence' – thesis concerts by MFA in Dance Program students

Submitted by Lisa Tenorio



Melisa Cervantes and Katie Ginn

Graduating artists of the Saint Mary's College MFA in Dance program will present "Convergence," thesis concerts, on June 7-8 and 13-14 at Le Fevre Theatre and The Museum of Art on the college campus and June 15 at Montara State Beach.

"Convergence" underscores a kaleidoscope of perspectives on the human condition, including the trauma-healing processes, the interplay between internal and external expression, the embodiment of spiritual journeys, the rediscovery of our oceanic origins, and reintegrating our disparate cultural "selves."

The MFA in Dance program at Saint Mary's College of California offers two distinct tracks of study – the MFA in Dance: Creative Practice and the MFA in Dance: Design and Production, which is the first program of its kind in the nation. Students in the MFA in Dance program span multiple generations and come from all over the world to study in the San Francisco Bay area, home of one of the largest dance communities in the United States.

The Saint Mary's College of California experience inspires learning that lasts a lifetime. For more than 150 years, the College has provided students with a rigorous education that engages their intellect and spirit, and awakens a desire to transform society. Guided by the Christian Brothers, the Catholic Church's oldest order dedicated exclusively to teaching, the College enrolls more than 4,200 students in undergraduate and graduate liberal arts and business programs. For more information about SMC, visit stmarys-ca.edu.

Ticket link and more information: <https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/mfa-in-dance/performance>