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PRESS RELEASE

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Family Creates a Model of Inclusion for All Children

“My pen took off as if it were writing a story on its own,” says Sharon Fialco, co-creator of the “Starabella” series of three children’s audio/picture books. “My thoughts could hardly keep up with it. Tara, the inspiration for Starabella, was now a young adult, and a college graduate. What was this need to tell her story and rewind back to her earliest days? Was it the result of all the pent-up emotions I had experienced over the years, or was I channeling this from some creative source propelling me to share our experiences with younger parents and their children first starting out on their journey together – to help smooth out the terrain upon which they would travel?”

Fialco recounts that the moment Tara entered their lives marked the proudest moment in her life and that of her husband’s. Marvin agrees that Tara bound them together. “What a child she was!” Sharon and Marvin recall. “Always on the move and full of enthusiasm. Eyes bright with wonder as she explored her world. Along with great abilities and surprising musical talent (which her younger sister, Dana, shares), Tara would later present complex challenges. “There would be many questions without answers as Tara grew up,” Sharon and Marvin admit. “A diagnosis of high-functioning autism would not come until Tara was 21 years old. It unlocked some of the mysteries while opening up new ones. What was its cause? What could be done to help it?”

These are questions faced by countless people today.” With their diagnosis, Sharon, Marvin, and daughters Tara and Dana were no longer alone. “We, together with other families, are now on a path seeking to solve this mystery, raising awareness of the prevalence of this condition, searching for a cure, and demanding social justice for our children.”

The Starabella series was, in a response to the difficulties Tara and her family faced during her passage through the school system. “She attended mainstream classes in Honolulu, Hawaii that were structured for convenience with the goals of standardization and conformity,” the Fialcos point out. “There were few opportunities to create a socially sensitive environment for children with special needs who had unique ways of learning and who could have made contributions to enrich their classroom communities.”

Starabella, the protagonist of their children’s book series, has trouble communicating with words as she begins to grow up. But she has a special talent that allows her to express her thoughts and feelings through music.

Children who listen to and view the illustrations showing Starabella’s adventures at home and in the community (via books one and two), celebrate Starabella’s accomplishments, feel compassion for her extra challenges, root for her to reach her goals, and gain understanding of her emotions through her music. In this way, readers acquire empathy for her by the time she enters kindergarten (book three).

The Fialcos stress, “Starabella and her classmates model the behavior of children who embrace diversity in their friendships and make empathetic social choices. They all

work cooperatively to achieve their mutual goal of getting to a 'Bright New World.'

The journey of producing the Starabella books and recordings serves as a perfect example of the benefits of inclusion. Only through the diverse, creative talents and expertise of each contributor could the Starabella Audio/Picture Book series come to life.”

The Fialcos hope that children everywhere will see how brilliantly their eyes will shine and how they become empowered when they have the courage to act on their own to reach out a hand to another child ... and see that child reach out to another child, and so on. These are the hands, the Fialcos conclude, that can change the world.

Starabella (Books One, Two, and Three)

By Sharon, Tara, and Dana Fialco

Illustrated by Anton Petrov

CD recording produced by Joe Vulpis, AP Music, Inc.

www.starabella.com

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