

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

Ms. Fialco, what inspired you to write the Starabella series?

Tara was a very enthusiastic child filled with spirit and delight for exploring and learning about her world. She brought us much joy. We celebrated her many abilities but were also puzzled by some of her unusual behaviors.

Upon entering school, Tara was made to feel there was something "different" about her. She was teased and isolated from play. Her spirit began to dwindle and she began to question her self-esteem. As parents, it was very painful to feel helpless to adequately influence her school environment to accommodate her learning and social needs.

Tara received a gift that would alter her life and ours. Her grandparents sent her their piano from their home in St. Louis to our new home in Honolulu. It turned out that Tara could play any music she had ever heard by ear and soon began to compose her own music. She used her music to express her emotions, dreams and reflections of the world around her. One of her songs: "Welcome to a Bright New World" depicted a magical musical world, far more accepting than the one she had to face each day. This soon became the inspiration for the Starabella series. In this bright new world "children played and got along and were accepted for exactly who they were".

Our family collaborated to produce the Starabella series to bring Tara's dream to other children, their families and teachers to help make the dream a reality.

The stories help teachers guide children to make social choices based on empathy. Through the Starabella stories, children learn to recognize what makes themselves and each other special. They learn at early age to listen to the good voice inside themselves rather than following the loudest, most threatening voice.

The messages in the Starabella stories are told through the medium of art and music. The audio and visual presentation appeals to different styles of learning.

What is the most important lesson your daughter's ASD taught you?

The most important lesson I have learned from my daughter is that it is important for her to believe in herself. This can be challenging for children with autism or any extra challenge living in a world asking them to conform. Children should be given the opportunity to reach for their own goals in their own special ways.

What would be your advice for those who are beginning their readings of the Starabella series with their children?

The Starabella books are presented in a new format. To experience the stories it is necessary to listen to the fully-narrated audio CDs with music and sound effects enclosed on the inside cover of each book. It is best to listen to the audio CDs while following along with the pictures in the books. There are song lyrics at the end of each book so children can sing along with the music.

The picture books are divided into chapters so that the stories can be presented one chapter at a time according to the attention span of the individual child. The recording can be paused at various times to discuss the messages in the stories.

*Book Three of the series is interactive. Children are asked to use a "magical mirror" in the book to help make social choices based on empathy to help themselves and Starabella's classmates get to the bright new world. The mirror can be used by children to identify emotions shown in their facial expressions. If they see a smile, their eyes, like Starabella's when she's happy, will **SHINE LIKE STARS**. This shows them that they have made a friendly choice.*

Anything else you would like to add?

The Starabella stories are fun for all children, with and without extra challenges, to listen to and interact with. They are like listening to a musical play. The stories appeal to various learning styles and abilities. Children will want to dance, sing and dream along to the music.

The story of Starabella speaks directly to the place in all children that yearns for acceptance and understanding. Together, children can

create the world of their dreams.

To learn more about the book series or to purchase your own set (or perhaps a set for your local school or library!), please visit the Starabella website <http://starabella.com/>

The Award-Winning Starabella Narrated Picture Books with Music are also available for purchase on Amazon.com