

Author's book project is deeply personal

Title celebrates different capabilities

| April 01, 2021

By Melissa Simon



WRITER AND INSPIRATION—Danny Jordan and his daughter, Emmy, sit among copies of "Rae's First Day," the debut title in Jordan's children's book series "The Capables," which was released March 30. "The Capables" was inspired by Emmy, who was born with an upper limb difference meaning that her right arm didn't fully develop.
Courtesy of Michael Hollander

It's our differences that make us beautiful and those differences make us super.

That's the idea behind "The Capables," a new children's book series written by Ventura County native Danny Jordan and inspired by his 2½-year-old daughter Emerson, who goes by Emmy.

"The Capables" is about kid superheroes who are born with disabilities. But those disabilities are just one part of who they are; they also have super capabilities that help them fight villains.

These villains aren't people, though. They're experiences that might be terrifying to a child, like the first day of school, going to the dentist or being stuck inside on a rainy day.

"Each superhero's capability, or cape, is connected to their disability and gives them the power to help others," said Jordan, a Simi Valley resident.

In the debut title, "Rae's First Day," the heroine has the power to harness the sun, which could save recess from getting washed out by rain. She's conflicted, though: Does she keep her superpower to herself or does she reveal it and help her new friends?

The character of Rae is based on Emmy, who was born with an upper limb difference. Upper or lower limb differences occur when part of a baby's arm or leg doesn't completely form during pregnancy or is missing entirely, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It occurs in one of every 1,900 births in the U.S.

In Emmy's case, one of the bones in her right forearm and hand didn't fully form. Jordan and his wife, Lynn, learned about the difference when Lynn was 22 weeks pregnant.

"I remember seeing Emmy on the ultrasound screen and her story was starting to be written," said Jordan, a TV producer who has worked on shows like "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition," "MasterChef," "The Biggest Loser" and "Storage Wars."

The first-time dad said he wanted to create something that would be "inclusive, loving and empowering" for his daughter because the world isn't always kind to people who are different.

"The very next day, the concept of 'The Capables' hit me," he said.

"Now, three years later, seeing Emmy look at the book and calling out Rae's name is the greatest joy I'll ever know because my goal since the beginning was to create a hero that looks like her."

Nicole Kelly, a member of the book series' advisory board, is a former Miss Iowa who was born with a partially developed left arm that extends 2 inches past her elbow. Growing up, Kelly said, she never saw anyone like herself on TV, onstage or in books. She said she was taught that her disability was something to be ashamed of.

It wasn't until she became an adult that she realized it should be a sense of pride, not shame, Kelly said. "The Capables," she said, is a great way to show kids that differences are super.

"Oftentimes, disability is talked about as something incredibly inspiring or as something that should be pitied. But my daily life isn't really either of those," she said.

Seeing a character that resembled her would have boosted her own self-confidence and saved her from the heartache and hurt she often felt, Kelly said.

Working on a project with so much heart has been a great experience and a positive step toward inclusion, she said.

"The Capables" launched March 30 with Rae's story. Jordan said other tales could focus on cerebral palsy, autism, dyslexia or extreme shyness. He would love to see the series turned into an animated show for kids.

Jordan, a former employee of the Conejo Valley YMCA, said he's spoken with Simi Valley Unified School District Superintendent Jason Peplinski about having the book available at Simi schools.

Peplinski said he hasn't seen the book yet but thinks it's a wonderful concept.

"We love the idea of including it in our school libraries," Peplinski said. "I believe that representation matters and all kids need to see themselves reflected in the world."

As a nearly lifelong Simi resident, Jordan said having "The Capables" in local schools would be a great accomplishment.

"Knowing there's a possibility that we might be able to expose kids in this community to this story and that the town Emmy will grow up in could be more empathetic and educated about disabilities is a huge mission of mine," Jordan said.

Hardcover copies of "Rae's First Day" are available at thecapables.com, and paperback copies and e-books are available on Amazon.