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Lamorinda Weekly's Goddess Gardener uses her farm experience to write "Stella Bella's Barnyard Adventures" for kids

By Vera Kochan



Author Cynthia Brian and her "Stella Bella's Barnyard Adventures" picture book series. Photo Vera Kochan

initial picture book, "No Barnyard Bullies." The story is based on her experience when she accepted a pampered piglet into the fold of her multi-animal sanctuary. Acting like she was queen of the barnyard, the piglet chose to bully the other animals, with a particular focus on a three-legged goat. Only a small bunny was able to stand up to the bullying piglet, who eventually realized that being accepted as "one of the family" was a lot more fun.

Brian's second book, "Family Forever," is based on the finding of a helpless newborn animal that no one could identify until it eventually grew a squirrel's tail. Not having a mother squirrel to teach it what should come naturally, Stella Bella decided to dress in a thick, long, green robe in the hopes of emulating a tree to help the squirrel learn to climb. Over time, the squirrel found a mate and left the barnyard, but the other animals knew that "family is forever".

"Oh Deer!", Brian's newest release, revolves around an orphaned, injured fawn who was nursed back to health by Stella Bella and her children. As the fawn grew she developed a super power -- the ability to read. Bambina, as she was named, read books to the other barnyard animals and taught them how to read as well. Messages of encouragement, love, and kindness were always a part of the lessons, echoing the sentiment of her "Be the Star You Are!" books.

"These books are based on true stories, except that animals don't talk," stated Brian, "but I hope that this will help to make people better humans. It's easier to teach a lesson through animals. I want my books to be lessons for learning about love, inclusivity, and diversity. They are topical for today's times. I also hope that the parents who read these to their kids will learn a lesson. The purpose of my books is also about getting kids to read."

Brian welcomes the opportunity for classroom or library readings and notes that the proceeds from book sales benefit her Be the Star You Are! nonprofit. "I am blessed and grateful that I grew up on a farm surrounded by nature and lots of diverse critters that taught me how to be a better human."

For more information visit: www.CynthiaBrian.com.

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Readers of this newspaper know Cynthia Brian as the Goddess Gardener. Most recently her organization, Be the Star You Are!, a 501(c)(3), won honors as Moraga's Nonprofit of the Year for its efforts to empower at-risk youth through literacy and positive media. Besides her many talents as a producer, interior designer, radio host, and more, she has authored 11 books. Three of those are based on true, personal stories told within her series of children's picture books, "Stella Bella's Barnyard Adventures". She chose the barnyard owner's name, Stella Bella, which means beautiful star in Italian, as a nod to her charity.

Brian grew up in Napa, California where her parents and grandparents owned a farm. "They raised all kinds of animals, so I have been raising animals since I was born," she explained. "Dad would come home with abandoned baby animals that I would nurture as a kid and nurse them back to health -- all of the animals were rescued. I'm like an animal whisperer. I also raised chickens and sold their eggs to help pay for college."

Now a Lamorinda resident, Brian keeps a menagerie on her own property. "Every time I lectured, I always talked about my animals, and people came up to me and asked if I had written children's books."

It wasn't until Brian's first grandchild and COVID's isolation came along that she was inspired to write her

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