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'KatGirl' author will read from inspirational book Sunday at Bal Harbour Books and Books - Katherine Magnoli penned The Adventures of KatGirl to help kids learn about people with disabilities. The Sunny Isles Beach author, who teaches at North Miami Beach's Keshet Day School, will sign copies of her book Sunday.

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**Author:** Rebecca Burton , [Rburton@miamiherald.com](mailto:Rburton@miamiherald.com)

Katherine Magnoli remembers the exact moment she decided to write a book. Magnoli, who is confined to a wheelchair, was sitting by the pool at her condominium in the summer of 2009, when she noticed a little girl staring at her.

"I started to think about little kids' curiosity. Sometime when they see me they get scared, sometimes they want to ask questions but are afraid," Magnoli said.

What began as a passing moment turned into a book that has sold over 1,000 copies to people, including President Bill Clinton.

Magnoli, now 27 and a teacher's assistant at a North Miami Beach school, penned a children's book called The Adventures of KatGirl.

Magnoli wanted to write a book about a superhero who was also confined to a wheelchair. More importantly, she wanted children to be able to identify with disabled people.

Her book's heroine is a girl named Kat, who like the author is confined to a wheelchair — but can fly.

"Having a superhero in a book gives children someone to look up to. The fact that she's in a wheelchair helps them to better understand disability," said Magnoli, who lives in Sunny Isles Beach.

Magnoli will be reading and signing her book at 12:30 p.m. Sunday at the Books and Books at Bal Harbour Shops.

"If you're going to explain disability, you have to do it in a way that the children are entertained, and try not to make it so serious and heavy," she said.

That's exactly what Carla Magnoli, Katherine's mother, did for her daughter right before she entered kindergarten.

"When I was 5 or 6 I asked my mom why I was in a wheelchair," Magnoli said. "She came up with a story about my spine being a magical tree and I was missing some of the leaves

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to make me move my legs.”

Magnoli, the youngest of seven children, was born in White Plains, New York with a congenital defect called spina bifida, which is an incomplete closure of the spinal canal that causes various levels of paralysis. After her other siblings grew up and were out on their own, Magnoli and her mother moved to Miami-Dade in 2005 to be closer to her grandparents.

“I felt that being accepted by my peers was harder down here than in New York,” Magnoli said.

Magnoli said she wants her book to reach out to children dealing with any kind of problem, from bullying, to feeling left out. She said that just by visiting schools around the county and sharing her book, she knows it has an impact on the children.

“I’ve especially seen a change in how the children look at me,” said Magnoli. “Instead of a confused look, it’s ‘Oh my gosh, you’re so cool!’” she said.

During her classroom visits, Magnoli starts off by asking the children what they think about her, with responses varying from sad to scared to confused. After she reads the book, children often ask to take pictures with the real-life superhero.

“It definitely has a positive impact on the readers, which is the whole point of the book,” said Magnoli, who is majoring in special education at Miami Dade College.

The author works at Keshet Day School in North Miami Beach and says some of the kids say they read the book to their younger siblings every night.

“Hearing things like this definitely humbles me,” Magnoli said. “I never imagined my idea would’ve amounted to something like this.”

She also said she can’t take full credit and thanks her family for helping with the publishing, which included numerous trips to toy and exhibit fairs, as well as the American Library Association Convention. Her childhood friend from New York, Scott Antuono, illustrated the book.

“It was a long process to find someone who could do the pictures, but one we found Scott, it was the perfect combination,” Magnoli said.

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