

# Meet Maria

## WISH GRANTED, 2021

It's not often that a child comes into The Wishing Place with a clear vision of what they want their wish to look like. Maria Duran-Bravo is the exception.

"I have always loved writing and I love kids," Maria said. "So, when I had the opportunity to have a wish granted, I knew that I wanted to publish a children's book. With everything that was going on in my life, a book about inclusion just made sense."

Maria was diagnosed with osteosarcoma, a type of bone cancer, at 16. She immediately underwent an intense year-long chemotherapy treatment that was successful in treating her condition, but ultimately required a portion of her right leg to be amputated.

Seeing a lack of representation for disabled children in the media, Maria penned the first draft of her children's book, **My New Neighbor, Macey**, from her hospital bed. It's a story that chronicles the blossoming friendship between the narrator and her new neighbor, a little girl named Macey who has a prosthetic leg.

"I work with preschoolers who have questions about everything," Maria laughed. "When they first see my 'robot leg,' they get pretty excited, but they are mostly curious. I am usually the first person they've ever seen with a prosthetic limb, so I want to teach them that just because I have a physical difference, I'm also a person just like them."

Normalizing people with disabilities is Maria's ultimate goal with the book.

"I wanted to put this book out there to allow kids – and even adults – to open up and have a discussion about how our differences make us unique," Maria said. "When you have a disability, it's so easy to feel alienated from society. I know because I have felt that way. But this book shows that at the end of the day, these are just two little girls with so much in common."

*I wish to be a  
published author*

**Maria, 20**  
cancer



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Maria also happens to have a lot in common with the book's illustrators, Abigail Cárdenas and María Julia Mancheno. While she grew up in Las Vegas, Maria is originally from Ecuador, where the illustrators reside. Maria has known the illustrators – best known for the work they produce under Lunalunares Studio – since she was a small child and has watched their popularity soar on Instagram. While they had never illustrated a book for publication, they were happy to jump on board with this project.

"There were just so many people involved in making my wish come true," Maria gushed. "I'm very grateful to everyone who gave their time and resources to this project. Being able to hold the book in my hand is proof of how all the pieces fell into place so beautifully."

Maria was able to hold a print copy of her book for the first time at her book launch hosted by The Writer's Block in downtown Las Vegas. The event featured a Q&A session with Make-A-Wish Southern Nevada President & CEO Scott Rosenzweig followed by a book signing. Attendees included Maria's friends and family alongside several local media outlets.

"When Maria first came into our office she knew she wanted to write a children's book," Rosenzweig said, holding up the book. "So seeing this today ... it's everything."

The book's vibrant colors and inspirational message of inclusion have already made an impact on people across the valley and the globe.

"I was FaceTiming with my family from Ecuador this morning and they were all crying," Maria said at the book launch. "It's been a long process and it's all coming together tonight. It really is a wish come true."

When asked for a takeaway from the whole experience, Maria smiled as she reflected on her journey. "Life will throw some crazy things at you," she said. "But it's your attitude that will get you through it."

Maria says that this is just the beginning of her writing career and has a second project in the works. The first print run of **My New Neighbor, Macey** is nearly sold out.

*Copies of **My New Neighbor, Macey** may be purchased at The Writer's Block in downtown Las Vegas, or online at [thewritersblock.org/macey](https://thewritersblock.org/macey). Make-A-Wish Southern Nevada would like to extend a special thanks to Beverly Rogers and Kristine Creel for their generous contributions to this project.*

