

# Sharing her story



Paloma Rambana will have a signing for her book at Hearth & Soul on Aug. 26. PALOMA RAMBANA

## After lobbying for the visually impaired, Paloma launches big 'Dream' at almost 13

**Amanda Sieradzki**  
Council on Culture & Arts

**T**allahassee's "Little Lobbyist" and newly minted author Paloma Rambana speaks with immense gravity. Like many other 12 going on 13-year-olds, above all else, she desires to be heard and understood. While this fundamentally unites her with peers, Paloma is exceptionally unlike any other eighth-grader you might have met before.

Paloma was born with an eye condition called Peter's Anomaly. Three

years ago she lobbied and secured \$1.25 million dollars from the Florida legislature for blind and visually impaired children statewide, filling a gap in funding for affected individuals ages 6-13. While her parents could afford the equipment she needed to be successful both in and out of school, she was determined to give others like her the same opportunities.

"I always liked the idea of speaking out about social justice," says Paloma, whose eloquence from a young age was encouraged by her vision teacher and

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### IF YOU GO

**What:** Book Release for "Paloma's Dream"

**When:** 2 p.m., Sunday, Aug. 26

**Where:** Hearth & Soul, 1410 Market St. D-1

**Cost:** Free admission

**Contact:** For more information please call 850-544-9970 or visit <http://www.palomasdream.org/>.



**Paloma Rambana participates in the Tallahassee Democrat Storytellers Project, sponsored by Envision Credit Union, at the Junction on Monroe in May.**

JOE RONDONE/DEMOCRAT

## Paloma

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parents. "I always had it in my mind that I could express myself in a beneficial way to the public by sharing my story through literature and making speeches."

The result? Paloma's memoir—"Paloma's Dream: The True Story of One Girl's Mission to Help Kids, Inspire Activism and Survive Middle School"—which is available on her website and locally at Midtown Reader and My Favorite Books. As she prepares for her a signing at Hearth & Soul on Aug. 26, Rambana reflects on how she managed to tackle such an enormous hurdle and write a book.

It took courage and audacity at age 9 to stand confidently in front of a crowd; something Paloma admits was no easy journey. She overcame nerves by reviewing her talking points with family and friends. Broadway music inspired her before going onstage. As a junior thespian she created a persona that she believed would share her story powerfully and tapped into that voice to boost her confidence.

As a writer, Paloma most admires writers whose tales are intertwined with struggle and overcoming incredible odds like J.K. Rowling, Malala You-safzai and Lin Manuel Miranda.

"When you speak your words are left in the galaxy; they harden in the air and you may not be able to retrieve them" muses Rambana on the ephemeral nature of speech making. "But you can find literature from many years ago that still feels important and tells a story. With [my] book you have my whole life, and I've written it because I feel like you can't explain things as well though speech as if you write it out."

Rambana says her co-author Hillary Ring was instrumental in giving "Paloma's Dream" wings. The book took a year and a half to write and included many virtual brainstorming and editing sessions after school and on the weekends. Some of her favorite parts in the memoir are moments when she mixed up "anesthesia" with Princess Anastasia or requested a mint or bubblegum flavored anesthetic before eye surgery.

She is most proud of the last chapter of the book "Life is a Daring Adventure," the title borrowed from a Helen Keller quote. Paloma agrees that a life unexplored is no life at all, whether it is chal-

lenging herself by going zip lining, skiing, leading a march or simply speaking her mind. Fiercely independent, she doesn't like to ask for help, but is learning how working and talking with others can make a big impact.

"My goal is for [readers] to be more accepting of people like me and people with all sorts of differences," says Paloma. "I want my readers to comprehend that anything is possible no matter how small you are, something I touch on in the book. There's endless possibility and it requires a lot of strength and courage and there's no such thing as an overnight success."

Her hard work put her in the national spotlight when Prudential Financial named her as one of America's Top Ten Youth Volunteers and "O! The Oprah Winfrey Magazine" recognized her as a 2018 Health Hero ("That Oprah?!" a giddy Paloma recalled). With sights set on studying in New York City, she already knows her top colleges by heart.

Paloma has also shadowed several professional women to understand their day-to-day workloads, and becoming a senator or even president is not out of the question.

In the meantime, she plots more books and poetry in her journals, takes

photographs to fuel her creative ambitions, and can't wait to meet readers and those interested in learning more about her story at the Hearth & Soul book release.

Paloma quips that while her vision sometimes causes her to fall in the literal sense, the bumps in the road she's overcome and is prepared to face in the future won't stop her momentum. She is adamant that her work as a lobbyist has just begun as there are still more than 500 students in need of funding and assistance.

"Seeing where I've been and how I've stumbled gives me the courage to realize that I can still evolve," says Paloma who recognizes that she just at the beginning of her story.

"I think everyone is given a book," Paloma continues. "You may not utilize the blank pages at the beginning, but over the course of your lifetime you build a story and you get to illustrate it. You don't have to be a professional drawer or sketch artist either; you can just create in all forms."

*Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*