

ENTERTAINMENT



“Full of Grace and Mischief” is the new book by the dynamo duo, Maureen Pacifici Smith and Fran Thomas. PROVIDED BY MAUREEN PACIFICI SMITH AND FRAN THOMAS

‘Our imaginations went crazy’

Two Savannah women co-author debut novel, the first in a planned trilogy

Polly Powers Stramm For the Savannah Morning News | USA TODAY NETWORK

The recent debut of a coming-of-age novel set in Savannah co-authored by a pair of local women has readers trying to figure out the identities of a handful of the book’s characters.

“Full of Grace and Mischief” is the new book by Maureen Pacifici Smith and Fran Thomas that has people guessing.

But Smith and Thomas insist that their work is fiction “based on true-life experiences.” Although, both grew up Catholic and share similar backgrounds, the authors took factual “seeds and nurtured them into stories.”

The novel recounts the story of two girls who meet at a Catholic camp in Savannah. From there, the book, in part, “captures (their) the coming-of-age experiences ... celebrating their resilience and the enduring strength of friendship,” according to a blurb on the back of the novel.

Yes, it’s true that Smith grew up in a large Catholic Savannah family like the character Mary Margaret and Thomas was raised in Macon like Theresa in the book, but those were facts that were embellished like every story in the book, they both insist.

Nevertheless, the women have been approached at social gatherings and elsewhere by readers who say things like, “Oh I recognize so-and-so,” Thomas said.

But the book is not a double memoir

or a dual autobiography. Instead, it’s basically the fictionalized tale of two friends who grew up in similar backgrounds, a common thread they discovered years ago. Kindred spirits, if you may.

Smith was raised in Ardsley Park and Thomas had local connections via family.

“My parents were from Savannah and my grandparents lived at Isle of Hope,” Thomas said. “After I moved back to Savannah, Maureen and I would see each other and chit chat and share stories about growing up. She told me about various pranks and mischief that she had gotten into (at Catholic schools) and before we knew it, we had a whole story outlined.”

At the time, Thomas, who also is an artist, had finished another book after attending a “how to write a novel” class at the Learning Center at Senior Citizens, Inc.

Smith was excited about the possibility of putting together a book with her friend, but didn’t think she was qualified.

“I was a little hesitant about writing a book because I’m not a writer,” explained Smith, who has enjoyed a long, successful career as an interior designer. “But I loved writing.”

Smith was keen on Thomas’ ability to create dialogue and descriptions and, at first, fed her information that Thomas would transform into prose.

Before long, Smith also began at-

tending the writing class at The Learning Center and the two started weaving their stories.

“The two would make time to put their heads together—such as two- or three-day trips to Jekyll Island where they would hunker down and write. “By osmosis, I learned Fran’s style,” Smith said. “Our imaginations went crazy.”

The biggest issue between the two, they joked, was that Thomas has a Mac laptop and Smith uses a PC.

Finally, though, they had enough information, or so they thought, for a book. But as their editor pointed out, they had enough material for three books. The editor began querying publishing houses and the next thing Smith and Thomas knew their book was picked up by Austin Macauley Publishers, a hybrid independent book publisher.

“We’re super happy,” Smith said. The two now are shopping for a publisher for the second book in the trilogy.

Already they have had a couple of signings scheduled and will appear at a couple of more during the summer, including:

- 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., June 12, at The Downstairs Gallery, 19 W. Gordon St., and;
- 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., July 10, at Courtyard by Chuck Chewning, 406 W. Jones St.

The book also is available on Amazon.

Want to celebrate Juneteenth?

We have the rundown of Savannah-area events

Destini Ambus

Savannah Morning News
USA TODAY NETWORK

Since Juneteenth became an official federal holiday in 2021, communities around the country have organized to celebrate the day, which is filled with pride for many Black Americans—their Independence Day.

On June 19, 1865, enslaved African Americans in Galveston, Texas, became the last to learn about the Emancipation but the first to celebrate the holiday that would become Juneteenth. Those festivities included a prayer service, speakers with inspirational messages, reading of the Emancipation Proclamation and more.

Though some cities have canceled their Juneteenth celebrations, the greater Savannah area is continuing this celebration of heritage.

Pooler Juneteenth Celebrations

Pooler has two Juneteenth celebrations, an annual festival held at Tanger Outlets, featuring special guest speakers, live entertainment, activities for kids, food trucks and vendors. The festival will be on Saturday, June 14, 2025 from 2 p.m. to 7 p.m., with a rain day of Sunday, June 15.

The other celebration is an annual run, which is at the Pooler Stadium, 200 Preston Stokes Drive, on Thursday, June 19. The run starts at 7 a.m., with a rain date of Saturday, June 21.

More information, poolerjuneteenth.org.

Savannah African Art Museum

From 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, June 14, the Savannah African Art Museum will hold its fifth annual Juneteenth Celebration. During the event, storyteller Adrienne Reynolds will have two African and African Diaspora story times.

The museum will also offer free self-guided tours, community resource tables, a community art project and a featured vendor who will sell various pieces of art and jewelry.

Make your plans at savannahafricanartmuseum.org/public-events-1/juneteenth.

TybeeMLK Juneteenth wade-in

On Juneteenth, TybeeMLK will hold its 11th annual Juneteenth wade-in next to the pier. The program begins at 9 a.m., but organizers encourage attendees to arrive by 8:30 a.m. The ceremony includes storytelling by Gullah Geechee leaders, singing, dancing and praying before wading into the ocean.

Patt Gunn and The Saltwata Players will lead event-goers to the water.

More information: tybeemlksavannah.com/event/tybeemlks-11th-annual-juneteenth-wade-in.

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Pride month kicks off with art show at Cedar House Gallery

Destini Ambus

Savannah Morning News
USA TODAY NETWORK

Friday evening, members of the queer community and allies gathered in the Cedar House Gallery, for the opening reception of SPECTRUM. In partnership with the Savannah Pride Center, the exhibit is a celebration of pride and powerful stories in the LGBTQIA community.

Each work in the gallery had a monochromatic or analogous color palette, inspired by one of the hues of the rainbow pride flag. The works were arranged by color, hues of pink, red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple guiding you throughout the two rooms. The theme Spectrum was chosen as a

way to be inclusive and open-ended enough for anyone in the LGBTQIA community to be able to submit a work that celebrated their identity and art work.

Jazz Howington, an artist at Cedar House who helped come up with the idea for the exhibit, said that the point was to celebrate members of the community and everything it stands for. She and the other artists wanted to do something that would be an opportunity to uplift the community.

“With everything going on with the election...people are kind of feeling down,” Howington said. “There’s a lot of uncertainty surrounding LGBTQ rights and how the current administration is going to affect that. So we approached the gallery manager with some of our

ideas.”

Sam Cole, the manager, loved the idea, and she also loved the idea of partnering with SPC to raise money for the work the center is doing.

Since current Executive Director Michael Bell took over the position in early 2024, the center’s focus has been shifting and growing. SPC has long offered programs such as administering vaccinations and HIV testing, providing space for youth support and clinic groups, and hopes to continue expanding as a hub for queer healthcare in the deep South.

“Georgia has the highest number of new HIV cases in the country,” Bell said. “That is something that we’re trying to [convey] to the community, and we’ve created a PrEP ambassador program-

...so do know that as HIV and AIDs organizations fundings are being cut we’re doing everything we can to get people on PrEP and tested.”

All of the pride center’s events are free, but they also need the funding to keep the doors open and expand, so they’re trying to plan events that also work as fundraisers.

“All of the proceeds of the show, all of the commission that the gallery has taken, it’s all going to the pride center,” Howington said. “All of the services that SPC is providing, especially medical and mental health services, they’re there, available, and we want more people to know about them, to donate and to help keep those services available.”

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